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Chartres

THE Hunt for Happiness

BY

Anita Vivanti Chartres

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PREFACE.

Cui Bono?

What is the good of writing a book? What is the good of reading it? What is the good of living? Or of anything else, for that matter?

I might have made the story prettier, and finished them all off happily; landed the young ones in the haven of matrimony, the pathetic ones in the grave, and sent the bad ones out, reformed, to begin new lives.

But young people do not come to an end with marriage; and pathetic people grow middle-aged and stout; and God does not keep new lives for bad people to slip on over their sins like a set of ready-made clothes.

I might have written a story with a moral to it; that would have been improving.

But, again, what is the good of improving?

I need not have written the story at all. What is the good of it?

Perhaps that is what God will say when the dead worlds come rolling in at his feet at the end of Eternity.

THE HUNT FOR HAPPINESS.

BY ANITA VIVANTI CHARTRES.

I.

"DOT," said Jack, from the sofa, "stop that row."

Dot pretended not to hear, and went on with her irritating Czerny Etude, tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, all the way up the piano in scales of C major, with occasional aggravating chords in the left hand. Jack raised himself on his elbow and looked at her. The back of her sleek brown head was obstinate and her small shoulders demure, as she put down the loud pedal, and tinkled, tinkled tinkled all the way down again in precise, inevitable scales.

"Stop that row, or I'll make you," repeated her brother, balancing his book and unmistakably taking aim at her. Dot wheeled round on her music stool, with her face all puckered up.

"Oh, Jack, you promised I might practise to-night."

"Then I unpromise," said Jack. "It's time for you to go to bed."

"It isn't," said the little girl. "It's only a quarter past nine, and I never go to bed until ten. How you ever expect," she continued querulously, "to make an infant prodigy out of me, and have me go out starring with Lea, I don't know. I'm getting dreadfully old—nearly fourteen—and I can't play anything but that Lucrezia Borgia piece."

"And a hideous thing it is," said Jack.

"Well, I'm never allowed to practise. When Lea is in, she says it bothers her. And in the morning, you all sleep till two o'clock, and I mayn't make any noise. Oh!" she said, beginning to strum again with one hand, "I wish we had mammas and papas and aunts about the house to make me learn things and to slap me and take care of me."

"Well, I slap you, don't I?" said Jack.

"That's a different kind of slapping," replied Dot, putting her other hand on the piano in a casual manner, and keeping up the conversation while she played. "Mammas slap to do one good, and you slap to hurt."

"I believe I told you to stop playing," said Jack, in the bland tones that spoke of horrible and well-remembered chastisement, to the mind of his little sister. Her hands dropped from the keys.

"You needn't worry about that infant prodigy business any more," said Jack. "Lea earns enough to keep us all. And then, of course, there are my patients."

"You haven't many," sneered Dot. "There's only cook; she takes your medicines and doesn't pay. And then there's Frank, who pays and doesn't take your medicines. And he only does that because he's in love with Lea."

"Shut up, cheeky, and go to bed," said her brother.

Dot slammed the top of the piano down, banged her music on to it, and shut the lid with a crash. Jack, who had been watching, threw his book at her.

"Bring that book here, you brat!" he said, as Dot was about to leave the room.

"Shan't," said Dot.

"I believe I asked you——" began Jack, suavely, and pretending to rise. Dot flew for the book.

"You bully!" she said, as she gave it to him. Jack caught her by the wrist.

"Send Mollie," he said; "send her here at once. Tell her to bring me a glass of water. Do you hear?"

"Yes," said Dot, meekly, leaving the room. Then she put her head in at the door again. "Beast!" she said, and disappeared.

Jack stretched himself, put his feet up on the arm of the sofa, and lit his pipe. The intermittent flame of the match threw strong lights and shadows on his face. It was a clever face, with big eyes, a big nose, a big moustache, and not much chin. He looked like an exaggeration of Dot. She had the same large blue eyes; his were larger and bluer. She had the same curved nose, but hers curved like the nose of a sheep, and his like the beak of a falcon. She had a small chin, and he had next to none. His mouth was hidden by the heavy moustache, but the underlip had the sulky droop of his little sister's weak, pretty, petulant mouth.

The match went out. He smoked in long, leisurely whiffs, blinking at the gaslight. The room was closed and warm and bright. On a table near him some half-faded roses were drooping sleepily over a vase, dreaming of open gardens and eager morning winds. He turned and puffed some of his pipe-smoke into their wan flower-façes, and made them smell of stale tobacco for the rest of their short pink lives.

"Shall I put it down on the table, sir?" said Mary, coming in with a glass of water on a large tray. She was an old servant, and she looked tired and greasy. She shook the water all over the tray, when Jack turned suddenly and snarled:

"What do *you* want? I didn't send for you. I want Mollie."

"Please, sir," said the old woman tremulously, "Mollie's upstairs doing Miss Lea's room."

"Call her down; I want her," said Jack. "Go away. I don't like dismal old faces around me."

"Shall I leave the water, sir?"

"Take it away. I don't want it," said her master, kicking off one of his slippers in the direction of the glass.

Mary waddled off with the tray. She was rather shaky in the knees from age and rheumatism and overwork, and from being always scolded and startled and screamed at. She bumped up against the door and spilled some more of the water.

"Drunk again?" asked Jack, mildly. Mary stopped and came back. The tears gathered in her little red eyes, slid down along her wrinkles and stopped at her chin. She could not rub them off, because she was holding the tray with both hands, and the glass was slipping about on it in the spilt water.

"I'm not drunk, sir, no sir," she said brokenly, "and please, sir, I'd like to speak to you about—about Mollie, sir."

Jack lay motionless, staring at her with his eyebrows half-way up his forehead in a disconcerting way.

"I think, sir—I'm sure I beg pardon—but I—I—Mollie's got to go away!" She finished with a rush.

"What the hell are you talking about?" asked Jack, quietly.

"Well, sir, she's my sister's child," said Mary, weeping over the tray, "and I don't like to see such goings on—as I—as I see. She's a good girl, sir—leastways she always was before coming here, and I want her to keep steady and marry Joseph, as was arranged. He's a good man, and a good coachman, as you know, for you pay him good wages—and he'll be a good husband to her——"

Jack was sitting up on the sofa.

"Will you get out?" he roared. "Will you leave off?"

Mary got out of the room as fast as she could.

"Send Mollie! Send Mollie at once!" he called after her.

"What a house! What a house!" said Mary.

In answer to her summons, Mollie, the maid, said over the banisters that she'd go to the drawing-room when she felt like it. She felt like it about two minutes after, and ran downstairs with a crackling of starched

petticoats and a great deal of Miss Lea's perfumes about the front of her dress.

"Well, you sent for me," she said, standing at the door and calmly surveying Jack's reclining form.

"Never you let that old aunt of yours get out of the kitchen again," said Jack. "Tie her to the table, throw her in the fire, put her in the soup, but don't let me see her pasty old face again, or I'll give her some arsenic for her complexion. Come here."

Mollie strolled up and stood near the head of the sofa. "Sit down here, on the floor," said Jack.

"Won't Miss Dot be coming?"

"She's in bed. Sit down," said Jack.

Mollie pulled a cushion away from under his head and sat down on it.

"That's cheek," said her master. "Now give me a kiss." And he bent over her insolent young face.

"Pfui!" cried Mollie, turning her head away, "how you smell of pipe."

"Why, that's nice," retorted Jack, taking another whiff; "try it yourself."

And he held the pipe out to her.

"Get along," said Mollie, putting it away.

"Oh, but you must," Jack said. "I want you to."

"What nonsense. It'll upset my stomach. It'll make me sick."

But Jack was firm. "If it does," said he, "I'll give you a pill to set your stomach right again. Or, if you're very good, I'll wash it out for you with the stomach-pump to-morrow morning. Smoke that now. Do as you're told." And he pushed the pipe to her lips.

"Ach! that's dreadful!" said Mollie, taking a whiff.

"Go on, take more—go on!" he insisted. "Now make the smoke come out of your nose——"

"Don't! Don't!—I can't!" she protested.

"Go on. Shut your mouth up—swallow the smoke—now push it out through your nose," Jack directed.

And as she coughed and spluttered and choked he laughed.

"There, now," he said, "don't grumble at having to take your smoke second-hand another time. Give me the pipe. Now kiss me at once without finding fault."

Mollie obeyed. "What a bully you are!" she said. "Lucky you haven't got long to bully me."

"What's that?" asked Jack.

"I'm going to be married," said Mollie, with a prim face.

"Well? Aren't you going to marry the coachman, Joseph?" said Jack, smoking.

"Yes."

"He lives here, doesn't he? So what difference does that make?" he asked. And she laughed.

"Well, I never!——" she began. But Jack shut her up.

"Don't talk so much," said he. "Put your arm under my head. What do you mean by taking away my cushion, eh? Put your arm so—properly." And he drew her arm round his neck and lay his head back upon it. The door-bell rang.

Dot sauntered into the room, eating an apple. She wanted to see who was coming. She caught sight of her brother and Mollie.

"All right!" she cried, tossing her naughty brown head. "I'll tell Lea!" and she scampered away.

"Confound that brat!" said Jack. "Mollie! Where are you going?"

"To answer the door," said Mollie, smoothing her apron. "I suppose they'll all be here soon. It's nearly eleven o'clock."

But the expected guests were not there. Only one gentleman entered, unannounced, with a large bunch of white roses in his hand. He was a good-looking young fellow, about Jack's age, thirty or thereabouts, with a clean-shaven face and a nice mouth and straight, clear eyes.

"Hullo, Frank!" said Jack, sitting up. "You're early."

"Am I?" said Frank Norton, going up to the little table where the fading roses stood. He took them out of the vase, and threw them aside. Then he put the fresh ones he carried in their place.

Every night for almost a year past Frank Norton had entered the comfortable, untidy drawing-room of the Lesters' house, at about ten o'clock, with a bunch of white roses in his hand. Neither he nor the roses came there for the love of Jack. The honest, upright Englishman felt a profound disdain for Jack's lazy, bullying selfishness, but a far deeper feeling made him conquer his antipathy to the man, and led his footsteps daily to a house in which everything *froissé*'d, irritated and offended him. Frank Norton, well born, well bred, and wealthy, had but two tender spots in his cool British heart. He loved his horses—his racing thoroughbreds—the training of which was the only occupation and the chief interest in his well-appointed existence; and he loved Lea Lester, Jack's fair-haired, soft-voiced sister, the young actress, whose début two years before, when she was hardly sixteen, had cast New York raving in charmed wonder at her feet. Vainly had he told himself that a wholesome English girl, the frank, freckled, tennis-playing girl of his boyhood's ideals, would have been a wiser choice than this ultra-modern American child, with the laugh of Frou-frou and the languor of Juliet, with the passions of Carmen and the idealisms of Norah in her fretted soul. Vainly. For his strong, straight heart had gone out to her, and she reigned side by side with his young horses over his sturdy mind.

"None of the others here yet?" he asked, with a critical glance at Jack's untidy smoking-jacket and slippered feet.

"No," said Jack, contentedly, "but they'll be here soon."

"Oh, yes, soon enough; better if they were not," sighed Frank.

"What's the matter?" Jack assumed a tone of deep professional anxiety. "Hypochondria? Mania of persecution, with suicidal tendency, and a craving for solitude?"

Frank Norton frowned. "No," he said, earnestly, "but I do think that it would be better if all these people kept away, and left Lea to rest and go to bed when she comes home, tired out after her evening's performance."

Jack sneered. "How do you think *she* would like that arrangement?" said he.

"It would do her good, whether she liked it or not. She is burning herself up, Jack. She is going at a fearful pace. All this excitement and noise and racket will wear her out."

Jack shook his head. "She won't wear out. She isn't of that kind. She'll break; she won't wear out."

"How you speak of it," exclaimed Frank, indignantly. "I don't believe you really love that girl at all!"

"Really love! How ridiculous!" laughed Jack. "As if one really loved anything but one's self. But of course," he continued, smoothing his moustache with his fat white hand, "of course, I am fond of her and proud of her, and all that. Don't I show it? Don't I take care of her and watch over her? Don't I look after her complexion and her digestion? Don't I see that she eats what's good for her, and make her take cod liver oil in the winter and tonics in the summer? Strychnine, iron and malt—splendid tonic, my dear fellow; if ever you feel a bit run down yourself——"

"I don't," interrupted Frank angrily, "I never do. That's not what I'm talking about. What I mean is this: I think, as you are not doing anything in particular yourself, you might look after your sister a little more." Jack was about to interrupt. "No, don't give me any more cod liver oil—I know all that! You might go with

her to the theatre at night, and bring her home yourself, instead of letting her loose among a lot of wild men and reckless women, who excite her and flatter her, and spoil her, for their own amusement and to her great and irrevocable harm."

"BOUM!" cried Jack, swelling out his chest. "Show me your tongue." Frank shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

"Bad case," continued Jack. "Five grains of pepsin before each meal, and half a tumbler of Hunyadi Janos every morning. You're ill. I'm ill. Everybody's ill—ill with modernity, or antiquity, or religion, or biliousness, or something. Now Lea; Lea's ill! She's got a mad form of *felicity-morbus*,—a wild, insane craving for what she calls happiness. 'Happiness! What is it?' I ask. She says: 'I don't know, but I want it.' And, like Bürger's *Wilder Jaeger*, she goes rushing through life, with a black devil on one side of her and a white angel on the other, driving her mad—a frantic Diana, plunging to destruction in the wild hunt for happiness!"

Frank Norton, who was standing near the mantelpiece, leaned his head on his hand with a short sigh. His face was pale and anxious. Jack looked round at him, and seeing how wretched he was, thought he might as well go on. "To-day it is success, fame, glory she's after. Her only flowers are laurel leaves. She talks of people as Posterity, of life as Immortality. The sacred Fire of Art is burning within her! Then it will burn itself out. And to-morrow her ideal will be domestic felicity! A round of simple duties cheerfully fulfilled." Here Jack turned his eyes up; his voice was mellow and his smile was bland. "Home, sweet home! Five children! her husband's socks! As for the sacred fire, she'll boil potatoes on it! The day after that it will be Love—Love, ardent, passionate, divine,—the only true happiness! And the day after: Pleasure! Jolly, reckless, forgetful Pleasure!"

"Not another word," thundered Frank, going towards him with clenched fists—"she's your sister, man! You're——"

Mollie threw the door open.

"Miss D'Arcy," she announced, in her clear, pert voice.

"Here's another disease," said Jack.

II.

SAPHO D'ARCY was a French girl, twenty-four years old and not pretty. She lived in bachelor apartments with a friend, a charming young American woman who had left her husband for no other reason than that she liked Sapho better. When the two quarrelled, which was often, Sapho would beat her friend into submission and hysterics, and then nurse her back to health and cheerfulness with the devotion of a slave.

Sapho's parents had always been dead. Sapho had a little money, and Sapho's friend a good deal, so both women lived and dressed well. They drove out together; Sapho always in black *frac*, with irreproachable shirt front and correct tie and gentlemanly hat; her friend in fluffy silks and laces, with tiny tulle bonnet, and a bunch of flowers in her small, white-gloved hands.

When they passed, lying lazily back in their carriage, people would stop and look after them. And the memory of their vague eyes, and of their mouths like a brutal red stain in the whiteness of their faces, haunted the minds of women, like the scent of a deadly flower.

Sapho smoked too much, and ate too little, and never drank at all. She was not a favorite with the men.

"*Je m'en fiche pas mal, moi, des hommes,*" she would say, with her shrill, cool laugh. And the women who liked her thought as she did.

When she entered the room that evening, Frank rose to meet her; Jack held out two fingers in salutation.

"All alone, Mademoiselle D'Arcy?" asked Frank, "at this time of night? Are you not afraid?"

"Of what?" said Sapho, taking her coat off, and adjusting her black tie before the glass.

"Of MEN!" exclaimed Jack, in tones of exaggerated horror.

Sapho laughed lightly. "Oh, dear me, no! Men? Why, if they only knew—they would be afraid of me!"

"I believe some of them are," said Jack.

She turned round sharply.

"What did you say?" But Jack had taken a box of cigarettes from the table, and was holding it out to her.

"What do you smoke?" he asked calmly, without looking up.

"Russian, please,"—she said—"perfumed, if you have them—white heliotrope?"

"That is effeminate mannishness, *ma belle Sapho*," said Jack, "and we have not such things. Try Czarewitch; they are Lea's favorites."

"Oh, Jack!" cried Sapho, with one long hand uplifted, "please don't allow Lea to smoke! It's horrid. It's not womanly."

Jack raised his eyebrows at her. She had taken a tiny amber and gold mouthpiece out of her waistcoat pocket.

"Oh, yes, it's all very well for me. It's my pose. But I love womanly women! That's why I adore your sister! She's so girlish, and fluffy, and pink, and soft——"

"Show me your tongue," said Jack.

"The idea! You vulgar man!" and Sapho lit her cigarette with her eyebrows all puckered up.

Loud ringing at the door announced the arrival of other guests. They came in noisily, laughing and talking all together. There was fat Mrs. Werner, who had been Lea's teacher of elocution, and her slender daughters, Clara and Adele. There was a thin journalist, and a young poet, and an old roué. They all came in and took their things off, and put their hats on the piano, and their

coats all over the place. They did this every evening. They came and sat on the tables, and stood on the chairs, and drank whiskey out of the champagne-glasses, and champagne out of the bottles, and waited for Lea, the young hostess, to come in from the theatre. Frank usually sat in a corner reading a paper. Jack played poker with the journalist and the old man; the Poet recited verses to Mrs. Werner, who went to sleep, when he didn't make too much noise over it. Sapho sat on the divan with her arm round Adele's waist; and Clara played the piano.

It was to this milieu that Lea, with her soft, mild eyes and her pale-gold hair, with her thirst for glory, and her hunger for happiness, returned every night—flushed, excited and tired, with roses tumbling out of her arms, and jewels out of her hair, and her innocences falling from her soul like a bunch of primroses untied.

III.

The great scene of the second act was over—the jealousy scene between the two women;—and the curtain fell to deafening applause. It was raised again, and the two young actresses stood bowing, hand in hand. The applause redoubled, as a huge bouquet of crimson roses was passed up over the footlights.

Lea Lester, the young "star," in her trailing silks and her waving, flower-crowned curls, stepped forward with a smile. Her blue eyes travelled across the upturned faces and clapping hands, and stopped at the third row of stalls. A dark-haired man sat there looking up at her; he was leaning back in his chair and laughing. She wondered what he was laughing at. Then she bent her shining head in thanks and recognition.

They were the same flowers every night: the same mass of crimson roses, tied with a long, pale blue ribbon, that Don Pedro Ailar, her brother's Spanish friend, had sent her every night for two months past at the end of the second act.

She had quarreled with Don Pedro Ailar the evening before; but he had evidently forgiven, for here were the flowers. And she stretched out her two white hands to take them.

But the attendant drew them back and shook his head. He motioned to the young actress in the background that they were for her; with startled eyes, blushing and shy, the girl came forward and took them. Lea stood quite still; she had turned as pale as her dress, with amazement and indignation. The public grasped the situation and tittered. The public, who knew nothing about the roses sent to Lea every night for two months past, merely saw her go up, bowing and smiling, to take the other actress's flowers; so the public laughed, clapped, whistled and hissed. And because Lea was the "star" and the other girl was only a second-rate, mediocre little woman with no talent, an ugly face, and a black dress, who had been persecuted by deaths and disasters through the two preceding acts, the gallery vociferously took her part, and groaned at Lea, and shouted at her, and said derisively "they wouldn't be so mean!"

She stood there without moving. Then suddenly she put both her arms up in front of her face like a child, and began to cry. The curtain came down, and the whole house laughed—they couldn't help it. The stalls laughed, and the boxes laughed, and the gallery laughed, and the orchestra laughed. And Don Pedro Ailar laughed more than anyone, showing his white teeth through his black, pointed beard.

There was no Third Act that night. Lea did not stop to change her dress. She threw a cloak over her white costume, she called the deprecating, conciliating manager all the names she could think of while she was gathering up her jewelry, and she left the theatre in a carriage, vowing that she would never return! Never!

When she reached home, she crept upstairs on tiptoe past the light, noisy drawing-room, and went into the

quiet room where Dot was sleeping. She threw herself down on the bed near her little sister and burst into hysterical sobbing.

Dot woke up, terrified. She sat up in the dark and screamed. Then she felt on the pillow with her hands and caught hold of Lea's hair.

"Oh, Lea! Lea! What is it?" she cried; and as Lea only went on sobbing the more, Dot slipped out of bed, and groping her way to the door, flew down stairs in her bare feet and her long night-gown, and appeared at the drawing-room door like a small, frightened ghost.

"Jack! Frank! Come quickly! Lea is upstairs dying!"

And away she flew again with her pink feet pattering up the stairs, and everyone rushing after her in questioning, terrified haste. Frank was the first to reach the room; the light from the hall fell full on Lea's figure lying across the bed and shaken with sobs.

"Lea! What is it? What has happened? Are you ill!" He was bending over her trying to raise her head, which she kept buried in the pillows. But Jack, pushing past the others, came up to the head of the bed.

"Now, then, get out of the way, everybody," he said, thrusting Frank aside, and pulling Lea up by the shoulders. "Speak up, Lea, and tell us what's the matter." But Lea only struggled to hide her face again. "Do you want these people out of the way?" asked Jack.

"I don't care! I don't care!" sobbed Lea. Mrs. Werner had seized one of her hands and was rubbing and slapping it vigorously, Adele was holding out a glass of water, and Clara was hanging over her with a brandy flask. "Can't you leave her alone?" snarled Jack, "crowding round her and monopolizing the oxygen! Now, Lea, behave like a rational being, and tell me what's up. If you don't come to your senses soon, I'll give you an injection of morphine to keep you quiet."

Lea lifted a red, tear-stained face.

"Oh, don't, Jack! please don't! You know it makes me sick! Oh, can't you see how miserable I am?"—and she began to cry again.

Then, brokenly, she told of her quarrel with Ailar the evening before, and of his cowardly trick to revenge himself by mortifying her before a house full of people. "I want you to kill him, Jack!" she cried, "to kill him! He's a black-faced, cowardly, card-sharping Spaniard!"

"What did you quarrel about?" asked Jack, severely.

Lea cast down her eyes. "Oh, dear," she said sulkily. "He teased me. It was here, last night.... I was saying I wanted to be happy, absolutely happy!—And he—he said he could make me so!"

"Damn!" said Frank Norton, walking out of the room with his hands in his pockets.

"I laughed at him," continued Lea, with another little sob. "I told him he could do no such thing. Not at all! Then he said, in that fiendish Spanish way of his, rolling his eyes and his *R's*, 'Don Pedro could make you happy, Don Pedro could make you suffer more than God or the *Deville!*' Oh, how I laughed! I told him he could add to my happiness by making me laugh at him, but as for making me suffer—never a heartache and never a tear would his black-eyed '*Deville's*' face cost me. He has done this to make me cry!—to show me that he could make me cry! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" And with the recollection came fresh tears.

"I always told you he was like a long, black, beetly cat," said Dot, climbing on the bed, and patting Lea's head comfortingly; "never you mind him, Lea."

"Come downstairs and have some wine," said Jack, taking hold of her arm. And after a little persuasion she acquiesced. They all went down again, Dot closing the procession in a dressing-gown, a blue shawl and a pair of Jack's carpet slippers.

"I shall never go back to the theatre again," said Lea. "I shall never say another line. I've done with the

stage. I hate it! I've always hated it!" She leaned her ruffled head back in the chair and let Sapho fan her, and Clara hold her wine glass. And with her long white dress and her halo of cloudy gold hair, she looked like an angel that had quarreled with God.

Jack went back to his seat on the sofa, where the card-table was drawn up, and resumed his game with the old gentleman and the journalist.

"Do you hear that, Lester?" said the journalist, shuffling the pack with quick, long fingers. "You seem to take it pretty easily, but it will be hard on you if Lea does give up her engagement and quit the stage."

Jack shrugged his shoulders.

"I know all this by heart, Tommy, my boy; the usual twitching of the nervus sympatheticus, with abundant secretion from the lachrymal sacs. If no complications set in she will be on the stage again to-morrow night, 'pale but composed,' with a rise of salary offered by the frightened manager. This little show of temper will not hurt her. Great actresses always have fiendish dispositions."

"I believe," said the old roué, with a glance at the group in the background, "that I see a tendency to what you might call a 'complication'—with a rise of temperature in that direction."

Jack's glance followed the old gentleman's eyes; Frank was bending over Lea, whose face was lifted to his with a meek smile. She looked like one of Titian's Madonnas, with her reddened eyelids and drooping mouth and white, submissive hands.

"Come," Frank was saying to her, in his quiet, authoritative manner, "and have a talk with me."

She rose, leaving the others, and went with him out into the cool, silent corridor. Jack went on playing without making any remark.

Clara Werner came up, and, leaning on the back of the sofa, watched the game.

"Beastly low trick of that Spanish friend of yours," said the journalist, cutting to Jack. "I never did like the fellow myself."

Clara clasped her well-manicured hands in astonishment.

"You don't like Don Pedro? That bold, that beautiful——"

"That bellowing, that borrowing Spaniard?" added the journalist. "No, I don't. And I prefer a game of cards without him, too," he added, laughing to Jack. "That man has the luck of the devil."

"The devil makes his own luck," said Jack, sententiously, dealing the cards.

"Come, Lester," said the other, "you don't mean to say that Ailar——" he paused.

Jack stopped dealing and stared him in the face.

"That Ailar what?" he drawled.

"Well, that Ailar cheats! You seemed to imply as much," said the young man.

"My dear friend," said Jack, resuming his deal, "cheating is a disease. By a paradoxical paroxysm of mental and manual divagations—your call, Mr. Smith."

And the game proceeded. Adele was at the piano struggling with the accompaniment of Denza's Serenade.

"Oh, Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle Sapho!" she cried, jumping up and running across the room to where Sapho stood, her head wreathed in the thin blue clouds of her cigarette. "I cannot sing sitting down. Do come and play this accompaniment for me. There's a sweet thing."

She put her arms round Sapho's waist caressingly. Sapho turned her face close to hers.

"With pleasure," she said, and they went over to the piano together.

"Luna fedel, tu chiama
Col raggio ed io col suon,
La fulgida mia dama
Al gotico veron."

The childish limpidity of the girl's voice, and the soft, swinging melody reached Lea and Frank, as they walked up and down the corridor outside.

"Let us go in," said Lea. "I have the melodramatic love of speaking while music is going on. Everything one says sounds so much prettier."

They went in and sat together on the lounge near the window.

"Now," she said, laughing, "I feel as if I *must* begin, in a soft treble voice, ''Twas seven years ago.'.... Oh, Frank! The theatre is a bad thing to live on! It gets into one's bones like an illness. One can wash the make-up off one's face, but one gets a theatrical varnish on one's soul, which makes one think of life as a painted cardboard arrangement that is all right as long as it makes a good show, and of God as a kind of huge property man, who is apt to make mistakes with the accessories."

Frank stroked her small, restless hand.

"You shall never go back to the theatre again unless you want to," he said.

"Want to!" exclaimed Lea. "No, it's all over! I've done with the theatre. I don't know why I ever wanted to be an actress. It was all Jack's fault, telling me I was pretty, and what a success I should be, and how many things he could buy with the money I earned."

Frank bit his lip.

"At first I really thought that to be a great actress meant happiness—absolute happiness. The success, the lights, the people! The big salary! The managers being so polite! And the looking pretty every evening! Then the driving home, and finding you all here to pet and praise me. The reading about myself in the newspapers! The seeing myself in big letters on the walls! Oh!" And she fluttered one white, butterfly hand through her waving hair. "Do you know what it is to see oneself stuck up on the walls? One feels like going round all day to read the posters! And how

people stare at you in the street! They'll walk back and turn round again to have another look at you. One can't help liking that, can one?"

Frank smiled. "Decidedly not," he said.

"That is *fame!*" Lea explained, very much in earnest. "So it seems," she added with a sigh, "that Fame is not happiness, after all. No, I've been nervous and flurried and angry all the time, except here, in the evenings. And I have had longings—oh! such longings for ridiculous things that other people have and don't think anything of. For instance, all these summer evenings, when it is so light, with the sky all violety, greeny yellow, when everybody goes out arm-in-arm, I have wanted to go out too. I have longed to go out—just to go out like everybody else for a silly walk, arm-in-arm."

"With whom?" asked Frank, frowning.

"Oh, what does it matter with whom!" exclaimed Lea. "It is the going out—it is the having some one to go out arm-in-arm with!" She shook her head impatiently. "You don't understand," she said.

"Yes, I do, dear," said Frank, and his steady brown eyes looked tenderly down at the troubled, wilful little face.

"Well, I," said Lea, clasping her hands—"I, on those light summer evenings, have had to go into a stuffy dressing-room and paint my face! Pah! disgusting!" And she wrinkled up her nose so that Frank could not help laughing.

"Do you know," she said, looking up gravely into his kindly face, "do you know that it's horrid never to get up in the morning? I never do. Once, just once, last June, I got up at five o'clock. Dot had a cough, and I could hear her in the next room choking and wheezing so that I couldn't get to sleep. I walked all the way to the Park. It must have been about six o'clock when I got there. Oh, Frank!" and she caught hold of his hand with her face flushing and tears rushing into her eyes, "there was a kind of early-morning smell in the air, a

smell of greenness and freshness that I shall never forget. Do you know the smell I mean?" Frank nodded. "Wet leaves and cool grass and pale, misty sun! How good it was! Well, that evening I fell asleep in my dressing-room. I forgot my entrances. I mixed up all my lines and I looked a fright."

"Poor little Lea!" said Frank.

"Oh dear!" she said, wearily; "I should like to go to bed at ten o'clock every night, have all the lights put out, and get up at seven."

She looked round. The Poet was standing at the other end of the room reciting verses to Sapho and Adele:

"And the fainting flower of passion that my crimson
kisses crushed
Upon her opening lips."

"Bravo! Bravo!" cried Sapho, clapping her hands. "Encore!" laughed Adele. "Encore! 'The fainting crush of crimson.' Beautiful! Say it again!"

The journalist had put the old roué's fur coat on inside-out, and was executing a bear dance to the piano accompaniment of Clara and the uproarious hilarity of Jack.

Dot was sitting on Mrs. Werner's lap and taking occasional sips out of her glass.

Lea turned round to Frank again.

"It rests me to look at you," she said, and smiled.

IV.

LEA awoke early next morning. She opened her dreamy blue eyes, with the sensation of something new and pleasant in the background of her thoughts.

She had made up her mind to leave the theatre; she had closed that chapter of her life and turned over a nice, clean page with nothing written on it. Oh! the glorious possibilities of that white, unwritten page! Only one word

was to be written across it, the one word: Happiness! but she did not know the language in which that word was spelled.

Two years before, when she had stepped out for the first time before the footlights, half-drunk with fear and with Vin de Coca, and had raved and laughed and tumbled through the rôle of Mérimée's Carmen until the public had wept and raved with her and for her, she wielded her desires like a magic pen, and thought that she had scrawled the great wonderword across her life in letters of flame and gold and diamonds and roses! And the word was spelled: Fame! Now, as she looked back, the letters seemed to waver and break up into a lot of long, ugly words, that wriggled over the page like serpents: Disappointment! Disillusion! Incompleteness!

And the word Happiness was still unspelled.

The clean white page of this day and the days to come lay before her like a shining, unexplored land. A great, impatient joy, a *Sehnsucht*, like the *Wanderlust* that seizes the Germans in the spring of the year, flooded her young soul.

The lines of a fairy tale that her mother used to tell her rose up before her: like flower-garlanded children holding hands they danced through her memory in pretty foolishness: "*Once upon a time there was a little girl. And one day she went out into the world to seek her fortune. Now it happened that the King that day. . . . . .*" Over and over again these words danced before her eyes: "*And she went out into the world to seek her fortune!*" She saw as in a dream the wide, sunny, peaceful road stretched across the lands, white and dusty in the morning sun—and she saw herself in a large, white straw hat, with some bread and some eau-de-Lubin and a powder-puff tied up in a handkerchief, going along that road, that quiet sunny road, "out into the world to seek her fortune." "Now it happened that the king that day . . . . . ."

That day was Sunday. In the afternoon Frank called.

Jack was asleep, and Dot had gone out with two little old-fashioned, over-dressed friends of hers.

Lea sat at the window alone looking at the people passing in the street. "What becomes of all these dreadful Sunday-people on weekdays?" she said, turning a smiling face to Frank as he entered the room. "The ten o'clock church bells seem to breed them; they live on ice-cream and turkey in the middle of the day, and on the Park in the afternoon; then they vanish in the night. Seven days after they reappear, as ready-made, as high-hatted, as long-coated, as hideous as ever! Sit down, here, near me, and look at them."

The afternoon chimes were borne across the still, clear air through the open window, into the darkening room.

"I should like to go to church on Sundays," said Lea suddenly. "I suppose it's ridiculous, but I should like to go. I haven't much of a religion, of course. Who could have, with Jack round? He calls it a disease. But I like churches and organs and everybody kneeling down, and old gentlemen saying the responses so loud! (Why do old gentlemen pray so loud in church, Frank?) And the Litany! I love it! I feel so wicked and so repentant all the time it is going on."

"Will you come to church with me one of these days?" asked Frank, looking her straight in the eyes.

"Why, yes! what fun!" and Lea clapped her hands. "I'll put on my blue crépon dress and that tiny fly-away bonnet that gives me the air of an angel with my wings growing in the wrong place."

"Oh, no," said Frank; "you mustn't wear that when you come to church with me."

Lea's face fell. "I know you want me to put on that grandmotherly black dress with the buttons, and the 'quiet hat,' as you call it—the black thing with plumes that looks like a hearse. I'd rather not go," said Lea sulkily, turning her small, angry shoulders to him, and staring out of the window again.

He looked at the back of her head, with her wilful hair pinned up on the top of it, and the stray curls, like little yellow serpents, wandering down the whiteness of her neck. He looked at her drooping, helpless shoulders, and her delicate hands, and small, impatient feet. A great wave of tenderness came over his heart.

"Lea," he said under his breath slowly, "when you come to church with me, I should like you—to be dressed in white."

Lea's face remained averted. He could not see her eyes, nor her lips, nothing but the back of her blonde head. "When shall it be, Lea? A fortnight—three weeks hence? Say yes! Say three weeks hence on Monday. In the morning! . . . . And you will be dressed in white?"

Still with averted face, she shook her head slowly, resolutely. Frank put his hand—a strong hand that trembled—on her arm.

"Do you mean—" he asked brokenly, "do you mean *No?*"

Lea turned her face, and it was rippling over with dimples. "*No!*" she cried, "Certainly! No!" Then she clapped her hands, and lifted her laughing mouth close to his: "I shall wear a mousie-colored traveling dress, with a little, little *wee* gray bonnet!"

Frank caught both her hands and kissed them rapturously. "Oh, Lea! Lea! Darling!"

But she had turned quite solemn again. "You see, Frank, what I mean when I tell you that I have a theatrical soul? The situation and the little *malentendu* was pretty; I had to answer like that so as not to spoil a dramatic effect. But I really didn't mean it at all. I'm not a bit in earnest. Oh, Frank, dear, don't tease me," she pouted. "Here's Jack. Go and tell him your symptoms, and ask him what he thinks of your tongue."

"What's up with Frank?" asked Jack, standing broadly in the door. "Everybody's so damned healthy in this

country, one doesn't get a chance to exercise one's profession. It has cost me a lot of trouble to keep the cook ill longer than twenty-four hours. I take her in hand every Saturday, otherwise she'd want to go out on Sunday, and we shouldn't get any dinner. Stay and dine with us to-night, Frank, will you? She had quinine, salicylate of soda, calomel, bismuth and magnesia last night. So we shall have dinner right enough. She couldn't have gone out if she had tried."

While they were still at table the usual friends dropped in. The Poet brought his *pendant*, the Æsthete, a fat, languid, beardless youth, with a fringe of brown hair touching his eyebrows, and a long coat flapping like a skirt around his flaccid knees. Sapho, who had taken Adele out to dine, came in pale and cool as ever, with Adele, flushed and laughing, hanging on to her arm. Then Mrs. Werner and Clara.

"How jolly it is in here," said Adele, throwing herself back in an armchair. "I love to come here. There's always a lot of light, and a lot of people, and a lot of noise. It's just lovely! One feels that one has taken off one's Sunday behavior with one's hat, and hung it in the hall."

"Here," said Clara, "taking off a very small bonnet and handing it to the Poet, "Here's my Sunday behavior! Hang it."

"There's not much of it," said the journalist, twirling the diminutive bow of buds and ribbons on his finger.

"I know it," said Clara contritely. "I can't afford more. Sunday behavior is an expensive necessity, and one does with as little as one can."

"Have some wine, ladies," said Jack, pushing the bottle across the table. "Inflame your larynxes and irritate your vocal chords; stimulate your nerves and relax your morals. Drink, pretty creatures."

"I believe I'm hungry," said Adele. And so was everybody else. The bell was rung, and old Mary appeared. It was Mollie's day out.

"Dinner," said Jack. "Dinner all over again. For seven."

A cloud of misery spread greyly over the dreary old face as it was turned towards the kitchen. She reappeared, laden with plates and dishes and forks. As she was putting them down on the table the hall bell rang loudly, and the old woman went out shakily to open the door.

"What a house! What a house!" said she.

V.

"Mr. Donpayder," announced Mary, and vanished down the corridor.

"*Whom* did she say?" enquired Clara.

"Don Pedro Ailar, your humble servitor," said the gentleman who entered.

He was tall and straight and dark, with pale, clear-cut features; and he carried his curling black head as if it bore a crown.

The young girls crowded round him, but Lea, flushing angrily, turned to Frank, and spoke to him hurriedly and nervously about nothing and everything. He smiled back into her eyes with quiet tenderness.

"What the devil do you mean by teasing Lea, and driving her into hysterics with your damned tricks?" said Jack to Don Pedro across the table.

"Into hysterics! *Ma no, ma no, ma no!*" exclaimed Don Pedro in his deep, sonorous voice.

He crossed over to Lea with hand outstretched.

"*Señorita hermosisima*, you have not been weeping—surely not!—for my poor flowers?"

Lea turned her face away with a scornful laugh.

"I should say not!" she exclaimed. Then she turned round to him, flushing with anger. "Yes, I *have*—there! You're a black-haired, Spanish beast, and I hate you." And she began eating the cold chicken on her plate, as if she had starved for a week.

Don Pedro drew a chair up beside her.

"*Querida mia*," he said softly, "you told me the other evening that I should never cost you a thought or a tear or a sigh. And now you have sighed, and thought, and wept for me!"

Lea pushed her empty plate across to Jack at the head of the table. "More, please," she said; "I'm awfully hungry. Happiness always makes me hungry," she added in a high, clear voice.

"I am so happy to-night! And—" defiantly—"that is because I am going to be absolutely happy in three weeks' time!"

"There is no such thing as absolute happiness," said the Poet, who was sitting on the sofa, eating with his plate on his knees. The others were crowded round the table.

"What nonsense!" said Lea, shrugging her slim shoulders. "Of course there is!"

"No," said the Poet, shaking his long head, with its straight brown hair lying sleekly against his collar. "We each have our own particular idea of it. We're all running after it, chasing our chimera with arms stretched out, and panting souls and trembling hands. Then, suddenly, the Thing we are pursuing turns round and faces us—and we see that it is Death we're running after! So we tumble on our faces, and the hunt is up."

"Oh!" said Lea, shuddering, and her eyes were like startled flowers, wide and light.

"What a horrid young man!" said Mrs. Werner.

"Beautiful!" moaned the Æsthete. "Let us be weird!"

"True happiness, Miss Lea," continued the Poet, "consists in standing aside and letting the others—poor, crazy fools!—rush past you, fighting and struggling and pushing to their doom. Do not live. Watch the others live. Let them do the hard work of living. You stand apart serenely and look on!" Then he gravely turned his attention to

his fork, on which a good-sized piece of chicken had been wavering and balancing during his preceding speech.

"And who pays for what you're eating?" enquired the old roué, who had been watching him with a lugubrious eye through his gold-rimme monocle.

"Eating!" cried the Æsthete, with deprecating gesture —the Poet's mouth was too full to permit of his answering for himself. "Oh, my dear sir, we never *eat;* we merely assimilate! Let us be delicate; let us be fastidious."

"Yes," chimed in the Poet, clearing his throat, "let us, like the sea-gull, merely skim the surface of the rough waters of life, only occasionally dipping in our beaks for the painful, though necessary nutriment required by the grosser part of our beings, then soar again to the clear spaces of the sky, and rest on quiet, outstretched wings."

He put his plate down beside him on the sofa, and, rapidly drawing a note-book and fountain pen from his pocket, began to write.

"Sublime!" wailed the Æsthete. "Ah! Let us be——"

The Poet lifted his hand: "I *beg* your pardon;—one moment. What did I say after 'surface of the rough waters of life?' Wait!—yes! I have it." And he resumed his writing.

"I think," said Clara, lifting her bright face to Jack's— "I think happiness means taking the good of everything and enjoying it, and the bad of everything and suffering it, to the utmost of one's capabilities! The more you feel, the more you live. And the more you live, the happier you are!"

"Happiness!" said Jack, pulling Dot's hair until she fled shrieking and weeping from the room; "happiness is dependent upon the individual twist of the vermiform convolutions of brain matter. Very often this twist takes the form of pleasure derived from inflicting or witnessing another's pain. A spiteful boy pinches a cat under the

table. That is not happiness for the cat, but it is happiness for the boy. A surgeon putting his knife—his nice, sharp, clean knife—into the shuddering flesh of his patient, experiences a thrill along the vertebræ of his spinal column which can correctly be classified under the phenomenon Happiness. Now, never mind what causes you that sensation or thrill, obtain it, and you have happiness. Adjust your pleasures," he concluded, "to the particular cerebral convolutions of your brain, regardless of the attitude or sensation of the vehicle of pleasure—and you have perfect happiness."

The Æsthete rose, and expounded his theories with measured gesticulation.

"Happiness is a color. A delicate mauve! A fainting mother-of-pearl! A minor chord of yellows! . . . ."

Frank, who had left the table and pushed a low armchair near to the open fireplace, turned with a look half command, half entreaty, to Lea. She rose and went across the room. Don Pedro's dark eyes followed her, as she sat down in the wide, grandfatherly chair and bent her primrose head towards Frank.

He sat on a low stool at her feet, and was gazing straight before him into the fire.

"Happiness, Lea," he said in a low voice, "is made up of a number of nice, good, clean things, keenly and cleanly enjoyed. The 'smell of the morning,' for instance,"—he smiled up into her flower-like face—"and the light of the summer evenings go to make it up. The leaning on a steadfast arm; the leisurely walk to church through the peaceful Sunday morning streets; that all means happiness. A quiet, orderly house; low-voiced, respectful, grateful servants; a drive in the afternoon behind my sleek trotters Bonnie Bell and Helena. A leisurely dinner; and a quiet evening, reading under the soft, steady light of the lamp, with some one else reading, too, or at work, sitting at the table beside you. And the lights out at ten or eleven o'clock," smiling again

as he quoted her weary words, "and off to bed and to sleep! Stopping, perhaps"—and his voice grew low and tender—"on your way through the quiet halls to look in at a dimly-lighted room, with an unspoken blessing on your lips and in your softened eyes the light of radiant mother-love! That is happiness, Lea."

Lea rose from her chair and turned away. Her lips quivered slightly and her face had paled. She met Sapho, who was crossing the room, laughing and whispering into Adele's black curls.

"What is your definition of happiness, Sapho?" she asked, with a faint smile. "You impenetrable, sphinx-like, unwomanly woman!"

Sapho lifted her vague, dark-circled eyes.

"All that is strange, my dear. All that is new; all that is unspoken; all that is forbidden. *Voilà*, that is my style of happiness!"

Lea laughed in innocent wonder. "That must be French, Sapho; I don't half understand it."

"Don't try to, Señorita," said Don Pedro Ailar, coming up and standing before her. Sapho had turned away, shrugging her shoulders lightly. Don Pedro looked down at the shining head and delicate face. "There is but one happiness," he said, in a deep, low voice.

Lea raised her eyebrows in pretty indifference. "What is it?" she said.

"Pleasure," said Don Pedro. "And there is but one pleasure."

"What is it?" And Lea lifted the azure marvel of her eyes to the dark splendor of his. "Love. And there is but one love," he said.

A smile trembled over Lea's upturned face. "What?" she questioned, and stopped.

Don Pedro bent forward. All the color went out of his face. "Passion," he said. "And there is but one passion—*mine!*"

With a sudden angry gesture Lea flung out her hand

and struck him in the face. He caught the little quivering hand and held it to his mouth with a long kiss. Lea half closed her eyes, blindly, faintingly; then she turned suddenly, and called, with frightened voice:

"Jack! Frank! No! Frank!" she said, waving her brother aside. "Come here! Take care of me. Come here!"

Frank had sprung up with flashing eyes. "What is it?" he asked. "What has he said? Was he insulting to you?"

"No, no!" said Lea, weakly. "No, he didn't say anything. I hate him! I want you, Frank. Stay here and be nice to me."

Don Pedro had lit a cigarette and sauntered out into the adjoining drawing-room. Clara, Mrs. Werner, Sapho and Adele had followed him. Jack proposed a visit to his study to the Poet and the Æsthete. "Come and look at my skeletons," he said, "and my bottled monstrosities. I have the finest collection of monster-babies in spirits to be seen in the town." The Poet looked sick; but the Æsthete closed his white, complacent eyelids slowly. "Yes, let us go," he breathed. "Let us be monstrous. Let us be gray. Let us be ghoulish!" He wound his arm about the Poet's neck. "Let us cultivate bats'-wings," he said, and faded from the room.

Lea was leaning back in the wide arm-chair by the fire. Frank drew up a chair and sat down beside her. "Lea," he said, "to-morrow I'm going to bring you a present."

She shook her curls out of her eyes, and with an effort found her wilful smiles again. "What is it?" she asked. "Those earrings?"

"No. A book," said Frank.

"What book? That French book Sapho was talking about?"

"Certainly not," he said quickly. "No. I am going to give you—a church service."

"Oh! a church service!" exclaimed Lea, and laughed.

Frank looked at her with very serious eyes. "There is something in it you must read up," he said.

"I'll have to begin at the beginning, then," said Lea. "I hardly remember anything in it except"—she added, with a run, "'dearlybelovedbrethrentheScripturemoveth usinsundryplaces'—and then: 'GlorybetotheFather!'"

Frank bent over her: "Read up—" and he whispered the rest into her ear. Rose-waves flooded her delicate face from throat to temples, as she covered her eyes with her childish hands.

"Then," said Frank, with a little break in his voice, and his brown head bending nearer to hers, "on the first page I'll write my dedication to you. And it shall be," he added, smiling, "a quotation from those two only bits you seem to know!"

"Oh, Frank! Not 'dearly beloved brethren?'" said Lea.

"No, the other." He took her two small hands between his own, joining them as one does a child's who is learning to pray; and slowly, impressively looking into her face, he said:

"As it was in the beginning—is now—and ever shall be."

She lifted her wild-flower eyes: "Love without end?"

"Amen," said Frank, and took her to his heart.

VI.

THEIR honeymoon was spent in Europe. They listened to the sentimental German nightingales in the Hofgarten at Düsseldorf; they drank Marcobrunner and Liebfraunmilch under the shadow of the *Heidelberger Fass;* they bought quart bottles of Eau de Cologne *zu Köln beim alten Dome;* they laughed at the *Studenten, Philister und Vieh* of the *Stadt Göttingen, die am schönsten ist wenn man sie mit dem Rücken ansieht!* And they crossed the

blue mountain-shadowed *Constanzer-See* into Switzerland.

"I love Germany," said Lea, casting regretful eyes at the retreating shore of Lindau. "And I love the Germans that have not come to America. But if you take away their Vaterland, and their *Märchen-nebel;* if you cut their hair and remove the sticking plaster from their faces, what is there left of a German? Nothing but his short-sightedness and his economy! *Leb' Wohl, mein deutsches Land!*"

Up the wide, white, interminable Swiss roads—that coil like wind-blown ribbons round the swelling breasts of the Alps—the horses climbed, shaking their bells in rhythmic weariness. The prosperous landscape spread in oleographic neatness before them. The flashing magnificence of glaciers, torrents and waterfalls, and the towering majesty of eternal snows, seem in Switzerland to form part of a picturesque arrangement provided by the hotel proprietors for the benefit of English tourists.

Up over the barren Julier pass, down through the shuddering Via Mala, table-d'hôting at St. Moritz, playing tennis at Maloja, wandering through the moon-like sunshine of Splügen's pine forests, clattering and rumbling over the covered bridges of Sufers!

Wherever they went the snow-tipped pine trees—like regiments of monks with nightcaps on—nodded at them in dark, stately benevolence; the squirrels stopped with quick, beady glances, then scuttled away, tail-flourishing, and scampered up the trees. And the cows and the women, with sweet, stupid eyes, stood still and watched them pass.

Then down through hot, narrow Chiavenna to the sleeping turquoise lakes of Italy. On past Milan, with its Duomo of marble embroidery; past busy, ugly Genoa, that looks like a small edition of English Liverpool; past Spezia, with its blooming oleanders smiling down into the cannon's mouths; and Pisa, with Giotto's Battistero and

the weary tower bending over it; down to Rome, where, like all American and English tourists, they carried off little bits of mosaic from San Pietro's dome, and huge, moss-covered stones from the Colosseo. They hung over the Rupe Tarpea, they crawled into the *breccia di Porta Pia*, they made faces at Michelangelo's long-bearded Mosè. Then on again, on to Naples—dirty, magnificent Naples!—with its picturesque boys and passionate women, and handsome, lazy men.

Down at last through Calabria, to where Reggio, leaning bluely on tiptoe across the sea, almost touches the orange-scented shore of Sicily.

They went back through Ventimiglia to France; through reckless Monte Carlo to indolent Beaulieu; past well-behaved Nice to blasphemous Marseilles. They talked jerky French, and strange, antique Italian to the drivers of the meagre monégasque horses; they went to all the shabby café-chantants of the Midi, to all the hysterical *redoutes masquées* of Paris, and then sped up to Havre, where they hurried and flurried on board the snorting, whistle-blowing *Touraine*, and sank down in their steamer chairs with great sighs of weary satisfaction.

"We are going home, Lea, home! Are you glad?" And Frank peered into the charming face—rose-gleaming through the grey silk veil—beside him.

Lea turned her light eyes on him with a smile.

"Very glad," she said, taking his outstretched hand. "I've been thinking of them all, the whole morning. Poor little Dot! And that dear, abominable Jack, and Clara, and Ailar! I shall be glad to see them all again."

Frank looked rather disappointed.

"I was thinking of *our* home," he said; "our own home, where you, darling, are coming to fill my mother's vacant place. I hope," he added, with a touch of anxiety, "that you will make friends of my friends. I do not think, dear, that the Werners and Sapho and that

Spanish fellow are nice people to have about the house."

Lea drew her hand away from his.

"You don't want me to break with all my old friends, do you?" she said. "They were good enough for me before we were married. I don't see why I should turn up my nose at them now."

Frank did not answer.

The water heaved and rushed.

And the ship throbbed away, like a great, unfaithful heart, from the fading, mist-blurred land.

VII.

"RIDE a cock horse
"To Banbury Cross
"To see your dear father
"Bet on the wrong horse.
"With rings on his fingers
"And belles under his nose
"He will lose money
"Wherever he goes."

"More! more!" cried Flossie, clutching with fat, pink hands at Dot's rose-nodding hat. Dot caught and imprisoned the little hands. Then, letting the chubby fingers loose one by one—"This little pig went to market," she began. At that moment the drawing-room door opened and Lea came in. She had a loose morning gown on and her hair was carelessly pinned up at the back of her head.

She stopped in the doorway, watching her little daughter dancing up and down on Dot's knee.

"That big pig went to the races," said Dot, beginning the rhyme over again in revised and altered form.

"This little pig," with a nod of her head towards Lea, "stayed at home."

"That big pig had a good time.

"This little pig had none.

"This little pig said, 'Wee! wee! wee! I want to have some fun.'"

"How do you like my new version of the old, sweet song?" she said, turning to her sister. "Well, Lea, you do look a fright," she added. The child slid off her knee and hung on to her mother's skirts.

"Thank you, my dear; you always have something pleasant to say when you come and see me.—O Flossie! can't you leave me alone?" She pushed the child from her, and crossing the room in indolent, slippered feet, went and sat down in a rocking-chair near the open window. Flossie took her dolls that were lying limply about on the floor, and sat them up against a footstool all in a row.

"I say it for your own good," said Dot. "I hate to see you let yourself go like that. But if you prefer me not to interfere, why, I'll hold my tongue."

Lea rocked wearily backwards and forwards.

"Oh, I don't care! I don't care a bit, one way or the other."

"All the more silly you," said Dot, taking off her wide white hat, and going to the glass to smooth her hair.

Lea lifted her little daughter on to her lap, and kissed the dimpled cheek, and pushed the light curls from her childish, gypsy-brown eyes.

"Isn't it time for our nap, baby mine?" and Lea threw an enquiring glance at the Sèvres clock, that simpered away the time on the plush-draped mantelpiece. It was two o'clock. "Why, we ought to be fast asleep at this time of day!"

"I can't go to sleep," pouted Flossie. "I tried ever so long. I counted a hundred, and I said 'Gentle Jesus,' and 'Let dogs delight,' and a lot of other prayers! But I couldn't go to sleep. And then I heard Auntie Dot, so I came in here. And I want to get down," she added, catching sight of her dolls, and wriggling out of Lea's arms.

"Say please," said Lea, holding her tight.

"Please."

"And give mamma a kiss."

Flossie gave her a little quick, wet kiss, and slid off her knees. Lea took up Dot's hat, and examined it critically.

"That's a pretty hat," she said; "who made it? That Leonie woman?" Dot nodded. "I must get her to make me one like it," continued Lea; "it's just the kind of thing that suits me."

"Oh, dear me, you're far too thin and dragged-looking to wear a hat like that," said Dot, still patting the brown waves of her hair complacently before the glass.

"I knew you'd say something of the kind. You always were a jealous pig, Dorothy," and Lea rose with the wide-brimmed, rose-wreathed hat in her hand, and went to the glass to try it on. Her long negligent dressing-gown was unfastened at the neck, and her hair hung loosely around her pale face; when she put the large, elaborate hat on, it was certainly not an improvement to her appearance, and Dot laughed derisively.

Little Flossie had come up and watched the proceedings. She thought the hat looked very funny, and she laughed, too, shrilly and ripplingly, with small hands clasped behind her back. Lea turned sharply, and slapped the dimpled, upturned face. "What are you laughing at, you stupid child?" she said. "Go into the nursery at once."

The little one, crying, picked up her dolls and left the room.

Lea took the hat off her head, and threw it at Dot.

"There, take the hideous thing," she said, and crossed the room to the window. She could hear Flossie sobbing, as she trotted down the long corridor with her dolls tucked under her arm.

Dot had picked up the hat, and was grumbling as she patted and pulled it into shape.

"It's a hideous thing that cost me fourteen dollars," she said, "and *I* haven't a husband to give me all the money I want. The bird is quite spoilt,"—and she pulled and twisted the tail of the little feathered conundrum that nestled among the roses. "I wish you'd throw your own things about if you must be hysterical."

Lea was looking out of the window, and pretending not to hear. "This hat," Dot went on, "will have to last me until you give me my next birthday present, or until my beloved brother gets another patient. I should certainly not have spent fourteen dollars on it if I had thought you were going to throw it about the place."

Lea went across the room to her desk. She hunted through it, tossing the papers about, and letting pens and pencils roll on to the floor.

"Here! Here you are," she said, finding her pocket-book, and taking half a dozen bills out of it. "Take your fourteen dollars. Buy yourself another. Buy yourself a dozen. Buy yourself a thousand." And she threw the money across the table at Dot and locked her desk.

Dot took the money, and put it together carefully, bill by bill.

"Thank you, dear," she said, taking out her purse, and placing the money in it, neatly folded. "You're very kind indeed. And, as you can afford it, I don't mind taking it from you. Shall we have some tea?"

"Anything you like," said Lea.

Dot rang the bell. A tidy maid appeared.

"Let us have some tea, please," said Dot, and as the servant left the room she called her back. "And some sandwiches," she added cheerfully. The girl said "Yes, Miss," and went out.

Lea had covered her face with her hands.

"Oh, Dot!" she cried. "You selfish, hard-hearted, unsympathetic girl!"

Dot surveyed her with astonished, lifted eyebrows.

"I don't see what I am to be sympathetic about," she

said. "You have more than your share of happiness, and if you don't make the best of it, it's your own fault. Why, to look at you," she added, with the scorn of her fluffy eighteen years and her becoming clothes, "one would think you were living in a boarding-house for ladies only. Such a hideous, dingy object as you've allowed yourself to become!"

The maid entered with the tea-tray, and Dot transferred all her attention to the contents of the silver plates and baskets.

"No cakes?" she enquired. "Ah, yes, that's all right. Thank you," she said, and the maid retired.

Dot poured out the tea and handed a cup to Lea, but she waved it aside. So Dot drank her own, and ate a couple of sandwiches thoughtfully.

"There'll be Frank coming back from Fleetwood," she said, taking a biscuit from the dainty basket, "where a lot of well-dressed women have been parading their trim figures and their pretty faces before him, well groomed women who take the trouble to look bright and happy and interesting. And he comes home to a bored, untidy, frowsy wife, lolling in a rocking chair. Frankly, Lea, I think you are dreadfully imprudent."

"Imprudent? What about?" cried Lea. "Do you think I'm going to run in competition with the women Frank meets at the races, or anywhere else?"

"That's exactly what you've got to do," said Dot, drying her mouth and hands, and pushing the tea-table aside. She sat down on the sofa, elaborately arranging her silk skirts, glancing down approvingly at the points of her shoes, and at the shimmering flounces and laces of her ultra-chic petticoats. "Exactly what you've got to do," she repeated.

"Absurd! I wouldn't do Frank such an injustice," remarked Lea.

"What!" cried her sister, with her irritating treble laugh. "An injustice to Frank to have your hair nicely

done, and not to wear dilapidated old slippers and hideous dressing-gowns?"

"You know I don't mean that," Lea said impatiently. "I *trust* Frank." A pause. "Entirely," she added.

"That's right. Do," said Dot. And then there was another pause.

"What do you mean?" said Lea, with an uncomfortable little shake in her voice.

"I mean that all this talk about 'trusting' is nonsensical," said her sister. "A woman should never trust her husband. She should trust herself. And what security a woman can have with her hair done up as yours is, and with no corsets on, I do not know. If you were engaged to Frank, instead of being his wife, and he came in and found you like this—you'd scream or faint, or break off the engagement. You would certainly never forgive him. If you were in love with him, instead of his being only your husband, you'd—well, you never *would* go about like this if you were in love. But you're married. Married women seem to kick off their little vanities and pretty ways with their wedding shoes. They flop down on their domestic hearths with that idiotic species of laziness they call trust."

She lifted her blue eyes in appealing protest to the ceiling. Lea was watching her with curved eyebrows and a faint smile.

"You know how the Italian women fan themselves," resumed Dot, taking a large fan of Lea's from the table near her—"the young girls like this," and she fluttered the fan with light, quick wrist, holding it high, at a level with her laughing eyes: "'*He's coming! he's coming! he's coming!*' The married women like this:" She leaned back lazily and largely, and with slow, complacent undulations, the fan swung back and forth—"'*We've got him! we've got him! we've got him!*' Ah!" she cried, springing up, and holding the outstretched fan in both her light white hands, "when I marry it shall be: '*We'll keep*

him! we'll keep him! we'll keep him!'" and the huge feathers swayed like a caress round the bright young face.

Lea sat up and looked at her.

"What would you have us do?" she asked; "be on the quiver the whole time lest we should lose the precious thing?"

"The whole time!" quoth Dot sententiously. "Charmingly, sweetly, well-dressedly on the quiver the whole time. My dear," she said, clasping her hands between her knees, with her brown head a little on one side, like some queer, clever bird, "you have been an actress. Remember that your husband is the public. It's a great mistake to treat him as if he were part of the show. Keep him in front of the footlights. If he sits behind the scenes, he'll never send you flowers."

Lea sighed.

"I suppose you're right," she said.

"I know I am," asserted Dot, "and I hate to see you making such a hash of things."

Lea passed her hand wearily across her forehead. "Well, what's done is done," said she. "And it's too late to change. I've made a wretched mistake, that's all."

"Correct it," said Dot, tranquilly, "go and make yourself pretty at once. Take a bath with *Eau de Cologne ambrée* in it, and use *Crême de Fraises* for your face. What powder do you use?"

"None. I never powder at all," said Lea, lifting her wistful face to Dot's investigating, world-wise gaze.

"What!" exclaimed she, "you never——? My *dear* girl, you must be in a bad way. A woman who doesn't powder her face must have nothing left to live for."

"I tell you," said Lea, with dreary resignation, "I have lost all interest in life."

But Dot was searching her pocket amid her rustling skirts. She found it, and drew out a diminutive

powder-puff, which turned inside out and tied up like a bag.

"Here," she said; "use this for to-day. And mind you get yourself some *Poudre de Java*, flesh-colored. Now go along quickly."

Lea rose obediently, but Dot detained her with one slender hand on her arm.

"Then you must get Colin's sachet-powder for the hems of your skirts. I have it in all mine. Smell it—it's delicious." And Dot put one pointed, well-shod foot up on the chair, and lifted her skirts daintily for Lea to inspect.

"Who taught you that?" exclaimed Lea, with a little approving sniff at the fragrant flounces.

"Lulu," said Dot. "You know—Jack's friend."

"Oh, Dot!" said Lea, horrified. "You ought never to speak to a woman of that kind."

Dot laughed with a look of superior wisdom at her elder sister's shocked face.

"My dear, for acquiring solid, useful knowledge as to the furthering of domestic happiness, commend me to 'women of that kind!' If respectable married ladies would only behave as they do, and dress as they do—for the exclusive benefit of their husbands, *bien entendu*" she interpolated in an explanatory way—"conjugal felicity would no longer be a myth. Why, if you were always all folly and fragrance, all evening dress and champagne supper; if you insisted upon smoking Russian cigarettes scented with white heliotrope; if you had amber veilleuses, heavy dark carpets, and softened lights all over the house, you would not be nagged at, you you would not be bullied, and you would not be neglected. You should be capricious, and wilful and extravagant. Never"—and Dot clasped her hands in agony of appeal—"never be good, or loving, or patient or economical. A good wife is the coffin of a husband's affection."

Lea nodded her head in convinced approval.

"If you *must* be good," Dot continued, with the air of making a great concession, "be it when he's out. Go to the top of the house, into the nursery, and sew on his shirt-buttons, and mend the children's socks. But never, *never* let him find you out! And as for sitting about the house as you do," added Dot, surveying her sister's attire with the calmness of despair, "why, you might as well let him see you clean his boots! It is simply suicidal." Lea's face assumed such a dismal expression that Dot thought it was time to leave off. "Now, hurry up and get dressed before he comes," she said cheerily, putting her arm round Lea's drooping shoulders. "And look happy." Lea smiled, and kissed her.

"I believe you're quite right, Dot—and—you don't think it is—too late?"

"Nonsense," laughed Dot, going with her to the door. Then she called after her: "And don't part your hair in the middle. You look forty-five!"

VIII.

LEA went into her blue and white dressing-room and shut the door. She walked across to the looking-glass, then turned impatiently and pulled up all the blinds. The afternoon light fell full and strong on her careless figure, on her pale face and the loose gold of her hair. She bent forward, and looked at herself closely.

"Will he ever think me pretty again?" she said to herself.

Then she forced a smile to her pale-rose lips, rather an unnatural smile, but it satisfied her. She certainly looked better when she laughed. Her teeth were straight and small and white.

She turned her profile, first one side, then the other, peering out of the corner of her eyes to get a side view of herself.

"I'm horribly thin," she said, but on the whole the in-

spection was not unsatisfactory, and she moved about the room, humming to herself:

> "*Luna fedel, tu chiama,*
> *Col raggio, ed io col suon* . . . ."

The words flashed back the recollection of that night, four years ago, when she had left the stage in her white dress and in tears; little Adele, with the limpid voice and the black curls, singing that song at the piano, Sapho playing the harp-like accompaniment, and Dot, with bare feet that had slipped out of Jack's large slippers, half asleep on Mrs. Werner's lap. She could see it all before her; clearest of all, she could see Frank's tender eyes as he looked into her face.

Alas! Little Adele, with the limpid voice and the black curls, had died quite suddenly—died, pushing her fat, sobbing mother away from her, and calling for Sapho! Sapho! Sapho! But Sapho was in Paris with her fluffy American friend, and passed the night of Adele's death in a box at the Bal Masqué de l'Opera—*en garcon, très-correcte en frac et chapeau-claque*—with a gardenia in her buttonhole.

And her friend was with her, dressed in soft white silk, like a bride.

Mrs. Werner and Clara had called quite often the first six months after Lea's marriage; then they had dropped out of her life, easily and naturally, because they didn't fit in any more. The Poet, and the journalist, and the Æsthete—she smiled when she remembered them!—they had come once or twice, and had looked bored because Jack wasn't there and Frank was, and because there was nothing to eat in the middle of the afternoon, and nothing particular for them to do or to say. Lea saw them occasionally when she went to see Jack in his dingy boarding-house parlor. There they were, the same as ever, playing cards in the daytime, and eating in the night—the

Æsthete cooked things on a gas stove in the alcove bedroom—but to Lea's eyes they seemed to have become more shabby and less amusing than in the old days; and in her heart she was glad Frank did not come with her when she went to call on her brother.

As for Jack, he came to the house quite often—every time he was hard up, in fact, and sometimes even oftener than that. Dot had tired of the fourth-rate Bohemia of Jack's boarding-house parlor, and had become governess and companion to a wealthy widower's little daughters. And because Dot was pretty, and impertinent, and independent, her employer raised her salary every six months, and asked her to marry him every fortnight.

But Dot knew better.

Who else was there of the old set? Ah, yes—and Lea smiled vaguely as she wound a long coil of her hair round and round her fingers, and fastened it in a thick gleaming ring on the crown of her head—Ailar! There was Ailar. *He* had not forgotten her, or tired of her, or slipped out of her life. Poor Don Pedro! How obstinately faithful his friendship had been! And Lea shrugged her shoulders with a little sigh.

What should she wear? The pale yellow tea-gown, or a severe, tight-fitting afternoon dress? She opened the wide-mirrored wardrobe door, and surveyed the long row of her gowns. There they hung like so many Leas, but loose and limp as if they had hanged themselves, weary of their brief trimmed and beribboned lives. They made her feel quite sad.

"I'll wear *you*," she said, taking down a shimmering dress, all white and pale gray. "Frank said I looked like a snow-cloud when I wore you—the only time I wore you!—'a snow-cloud with summer blue eyes!' Ah! Frank, Frank! I've been a very stupid girl, but '*nous allons changer tout cela!*'" And she slipped her bare arms into the shining sleeves. "We are going to be happy together—really happy! Because after all," she

said, standing before the glass, "even if you have left off loving me, you will fall in love with me again."

And standing thus, in her soft-tinted gown, she looked like some great wan pearl come to life in a fairy-tale.

IX.

MEANWHILE Dot, in the drawing-room, had eaten two more sandwiches and half a dozen cakes; then she had gone to the mirror over the mantelpiece, and frowningly surveyed herself.

"It is extraordinary that I never can give both my eyebrows exactly the same curve," she said, and took a tiny, pencil-shaped case out of her pocket. She was touching-up the delicate line of her left eyebrow, when the hall bell rang. She stopped, pencil in hand, to see who it was, but when she heard Jack's voice in the hall she resumed her task.

"Hullo, Vixen, you here again?" said her brother, sauntering in. "What are you always here for?"

"Apparently to meet you," said Dot, without turning round, carefully wetting her little finger, and passing it over the light-swung, tinted arch of her eyebrow. "What are *you* always here for?"

"I come professionally," said Jack, pouring himself out a cup of tea. "I am treating the family."

"What a treat!" sneered Dot.

"Where's Lea?" asked her brother, presently.

"She is dressing," said Dot, and sat down opposite him.

"Dressing? What for? Where is she going? I have never known her to dress for two years," said Jack, eating. "It is one of her symptoms."

"If I were you, Jack, I'd look after my own symptoms," said Dot—"you've got plenty of them."

Jack scowled at her.

"Shut up, brat. You preach too much; that's your disease. Don't talk; don't think; don't interfere with other people's business; try to be perfectly selfish. That is normal, therefore healthy. I am normal. I am the only undiseased one in the family."

There was a pause. Jack drank some more tea, and then put down his cup noisily.

"What are my symptoms, anyhow?" he said.

Dot looked at him in critcising surveyal.

"I—I really hardly know—" she said hesitating. "But you seem to be—you look—you look *drunk*. There!"

"Drunk!" cried Jack. "What are you talking about? Do you ever see me drink?"

"No," Dot admitted, with perplexed countenance; "that is the strangest part of it. I don't know when you drink, but you *are* drunk, often. Why, last night at that dinner in our house you were dreadful. You sat there looking like an idiot with your eyes half shut and your mouth open. I was ashamed of you."

"You were, were you, you Vixen?" sneered Jack.

Dot turned away wearily. "You make me sick!" she said.

"'We are a happy family, we are, we are, we are!'" sang Jack, pouring himself out another cup of tea.

The hall door closed; quick, cheerful steps sounded down the hall, and Frank entered. He looked handsome and healthy.

"Well, Jack?—Dottie, how are you. Now, then," and he threw himself into an arm-chair with a triumphant smile, "didn't I tell you that Bluebell was the greatest four-year-old in the country?"

"Did she win?" cried Dot, jumping up.

"*Did she win?*—but where's Lea?" said Frank, stopping short; "I won't tell the news till she's here too."

"She'll come directly," said Dot, moving towards the door; "I'll call her."

Frank caught Dot's hand and drew her back. "What is

she doing?" he asked in anxious undertones. "Where is she? Not moping again?"

Dot laughed airily.

"Oh, dear me, no! Moping, indeed! Why," turning a mischievous face to Frank, as she left the room, "she *never* mopes!"

Frank sat back in his chair with a sigh.

"I suppose," said Jack gloomily, from the sofa, "I suppose you made a pile of money on that mare of yours."

"Well," answered Frank, "not quite as much as I ought to, because I had backed Charger pretty heavily too. That horse," he continued, taking out a programme of the races, "has played me false ever since I bought him. To-day he broke badly and sulked all the way. I'll have to get rid of him. He's nothing but expense and anxiety. Still," and he looked up with a cheery smile, "I can't complain of to-day's sport. Bluebell is a trump. Hard up, Jack?"

"N—no. No. Oh no," said his brother-in-law.

"Would fifty wound your pride?"

"N—no. No," said Jack, with a far-away smile.

Frank laughed and took a roll of bills out of his pocket-book. He found a $50 note, and handed it to Jack.

"Here you are, doctor," he said good-humoredly, "for professional services rendered." Then he changed his tone and asked quite seriously, "How do you find Lea?"

"I haven't seen her to-day," said Jack, "but she will never be any better. Hers is a malevolent modern malady that has no cure. She has a never-to-be-satisfied longing for what does not exist. She is hungry for a food that no man has ever tasted—Happiness, she calls it, a mad, mythical name! 'Try cake,' says somebody, 'that's what you want.' And so she eats cake until she's sick. 'That's not it; give me something else.' 'Try good, wholesome roast beef, that is *my* food,' you say. And she tries roast beef. 'No, no, give me something else.' Oysters, champagne, caviar—no, that's not it! 'Per-

haps it is coarse dry bread I want,' says she. 'That's it! Rough black bread! Pah! That's not it. I'm still hungry! Give me *That*—what you have there!' 'But that's Poison!' 'Well, give me poison!' 'But that is *Death!*' 'Death? Perhaps that is what I want. Give me death!' Then she will sit up in her coffin—'Give me eternity!' she'll say. And God will laugh. 'Why, there's no such thing,' says He."

X.

LEA appeared in the open doorway. She looked mystically beautiful in the pathetic gray of her trailing gown and the laughing gold of her hair. She turned to Dot, whose arm was around her waist, and whispered, with a little laugh, "We'll keep him! We'll keep him!" Then she entered the room. Frank's back was turned to the door, and he did not see her come in. She went up to him, and, leaning on the back of his chair, let one languid hand droop over his shoulder.

"What news, Frank?" she asked.

"Excellent news, my dear," said her husband, without turning round. "Bluebell won both heats like a fairy. She was in the lead the whole time," and he patted her soft hand absent-mindedly. Then he launched into a vivid account of the races to Jack. Lea sat down in front of him, but he was deep in a technical description of Charger's defeat, and took no particular notice of her.

After the horse's vices and misdemeanors had been discussed, and he had returned to Bluebell's triumphs: "Are you glad?" he asked, turning to Lea, his strong, handsome face still flushed with the heat and excitement of the day.

"Yes, very," Lea answered, indifferently. "Was Mrs. Vane there?"

"I should say so, and in great form," said Frank.

"She's a smart little thoroughbred herself, and she drives like an English gentleman."

"Did you speak to her?"

"Oh, yes, I hung round with the rest," said Frank. "But, as I was saying," he went on, turning to Jack, "I'll run Bluebell for the Brooklyn stakes. I'll get old Morton to put her in training——"

"Would you like some tea, Frank?" interrupted Lea. "I'll order it at once."

"No, thanks; no." And he continued to Jack, "Yes, I think Morton is the best man in the country for——"

"Frank, did you post that letter?" Lea interposed again.

"What letter?" he asked impatiently.

"Why, that letter to Mrs. Werner I gave you this morning."

"No, hang it all, I forgot all about it," and Frank took the letter out of his pocket and tossed it across the table to her. "Give it to Mary."

"Well, considering I *asked* you not to forget it——" began Lea, in a severe tone. But Frank stopped her.

"Ouf! Don't scold, Lea. Give it to Mary, and have done with it." He turned once more to Jack. "The worst about Morton is, he drinks, and you can't always rely on him."

Lea, flushing angrily, took the letter from the table, and flounced out of the room. Dot followed her. In the hall she stopped. "Do you see? Do you see how he treats me? What is the good of anything?" she said, trembling with indignation. "He never so much as noticed me, or my dress, or anything. I hate him!" she said, pushing past Dot, and going to the kitchen door. "Here, Mary, post this letter." Then she came back along the passage, where Dot stood waiting for her.

"Dear girl," began Dot, explaining, "if you had let him talk himself out about the horses, he would have paid attention to you. Humor him a little, for goodness' sake!

Show an interest——" But Lea shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

Meanwhile the conversation in the drawing-room had changed. When the two sisters left the room, Jack, still leaning back in his chair, interrupted Frank's dissertation on Morton's intemperance.

"As your family doctor," he said, "—new symptoms in that quarter!" And he nodded towards the door.

"What's that? What are you talking about?" asked Frank, surprised.

"Where has Lea been?" asked Jack, with sphinx-like solemnity.

"Nowhere."

"Where is she going to?"

"Why, nowhere," repeated Frank, uneasily.

"Whom is she expecting?"

"I'm sure I don't know. What is the matter, Jack? What are you driving at?"

"The outer surface denotes inner complications," said Jack funereally. "Look at her." Frank turned round. Lea had come in, and was standing in the doorway talking in a low voice to Dot. At Dot's reply Lea shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, I don't care, I don't care!" she said, and, turning from her sister, came in and sat on the sofa.

"What's the matter, Dottie?" asked Frank cheerfully, across the room. "What is it that Lea doesn't care about?"

Lea answered for herself. "I don't care about anything or anybody," she said, laying her head back among the cushions.

"That's sweet," said Frank, and then there was a pause.

Lea turned languidly to her brother:

"Well, Jack, if you *must* go, I suppose Dot may as well go with you."

"All right," he said, reaching out for his hat. "Ta-ta. You look as if you were expecting royalty, so chivvy out the poor relations. See you again, Frank."

Dot in the background was struggling with her coat. "Oh, can someone help me with these sleeves?" she said appealingly, and Frank crossed over to her aid.

Jack stood near Lea. "May I?" he said, taking one of Frank's cigars out of a box on the table. Lea nodded. "Don't make a damned ass of yourself," he said under his breath. "I don't know what you're up to, and I don't want to. But Frank's a good fellow; stick to him." He put the cigar in his mouth and struck a match. "May I?" Lea nodded again. "But in case you should ever require—" puff-puff,—"the poor relations,"—puff—"hunt me up. You know where my mansions are."

Lea bent across the table towards him.

"Jack, have you any more of that morphine? I want some."

"Now, Lea, don't overdo things," said her brother. He put his hand in his waist-coat pocket, and drew out a little bottle. It was half empty.

"No, I have none to spare," he said, and put it back again.

"Oh, give me that, Jack, do give me that," said Lea, under her breath, rising. "Please! I want it! I pass such horrible nights!" She went close to him, and took the little bottle out of his pocket with quick, nervous fingers.

"Well, mind: *I* haven't given it to you," said Jack, warningly, "and I've told you to see what you're about."

Dot came up ready to go. She kissed Lea, and shook hands with Frank. Jack went into the hall and put on his overcoat.

"'We are a happy family, we are, we are, we are!' Come on, Dot," he sang out.

XI.

LEA leaned listlessly back on the sofa. Frank stood near the mantelpiece looking at her, his troubled brown eyes taking in every detail of her fair, passionless beauty.

How dearly he loved her! Every line of the mutinous face, every curve of the wilful lips, every thread of the moonshine hair touched his strong heart with the appeal of their delicate frailty. He said to himself: "If she would only look up! I would open my arms and call her to my heart!"

But the long, fair lashes remained obstinately lowered.

"If only he would speak to me," she was thinking. "If only he called me by my name with a kind voice! I would go to his arms and weep all my discontent away."

And so the God-given moment passed, because she did not raise her lashes, and he did not speak her name.

On, on to destruction plunged the wild horses in the frantic hunt. On, on to her doom, with outstretched arms and blind blue eyes went Lea; across the dark lands of despair, across the hedges and fences of error; through the scarlet valleys of sin, to the desolate Desert of Death. Flung forward on the thin steed of Desire, she went, calling, calling through the mist and the darkness: "Happiness! Happiness! Happiness!"

"Here!" "Here!" "Here!" The flitting phantoms before her, beyond her, breathed the far-away word. And on she tumbled through the darkness, on, after Happiness, God's monstrous Will o' the Wisp!

Frank spoke at last. "For whom all this splendor?" he asked, with his hands in his pockets. Lea did not answer.

She looked at the rose-leaf nails of her right hand, and rubbed them lightly on the palm of her left.

"Are you expecting anyone this afternoon?"

"N—no. Not that I know of," answered Lea, with slow indifference. Then she took up a book and began to read.

"You don't seem to be much interested in Bluebell's success," said Frank. Lea went on reading without lifting her eyes. "But, then, you never are in anything that concerns me and my affairs."

Lea yawned. "We are very much alike in that respect," she said.

"What do you mean?" asked Frank.

"Well, my friends and my amusements annoy you," she said, laying the book down on her lap; "and your friends, and your horses, and your races bore me."

"I don't think they ought to bore you, considering that it's my horses and my races that give you all the comfort you have," said Frank resentfully.

"Comfort! Pah!" sneered Lea, and resumed her book. There was a pause.

"Yes," said her husband. "I think you ought to be pretty comfortable. You don't have to bother much about the house—the servants do that. You don't bother about little Flossie either—the nurse does that. I can't see what you've got to sneer at or to grumble at. You have all you want."

Lea sat up. "All I want!" she cried. "I have *nothing* I want! Nothing! Nothing! Nothing!" Frank leaned his elbow on the mantelpiece and gazed at her in displeased silence. "I wanted happiness," she continued; "what have I got? Wearying, oppressing, sickening boredom. I wanted peace, and what have I got? Nagging, and quarreling and sulking from morning to night. I wanted love, and what have I got? Mild, lukewarm 'affection,' more hateful than hatred! You have taken me away from all that was bright and brilliant in my life—"

"Oh, yes!" interrupted her husband, with a little laugh, "a very bright and brilliant life you were leading! And delightful people you had around you!"

Lea's eyes flashed angrily. "They were better than the horrible old bores you have forced upon me for the last three years. Mrs. Merton and her religion; Mrs. Farwell and her children; Lady Vere and her views; your sister——"

"Lea!" cried Frank, stopping her with a warning gesture.

"Yes, your sister," repeated Lea, "your sister! She's the worst of the lot, with her low voice and calm manners, and her goodness and her ugly dresses."

"Lea!" and Frank's voice was grieved and reproachful.

"She irritates me. She maddens me," Lea went on excitedly. "Every time she begins to speak, so softly and slowly and smoothly, I feel as if I should like to scream and shout bad words at her. When she dines here, eating carefully with her little fingers in the air, and her 'thank-you's' and her 'might-I-trouble-you's,' I feel as if I must throw the crockery about, and put my feet on the table, and joke with the butler."

"I think you must be ill," said her husband gravely.

"That's it, I'm ill," laughed Lea bitterly. "Jack has told you that. It's a comfortable way of putting things." And she walked up and down, clasping and unclasping her small, distracted hands. Then she stopped before Frank. "Am I ill?" she cried; "then we are *all* ill! We are all impatient and longing and yearning for something more, something else, something—" she stopped, trying to find a word: "something *more!*" she repeated, with an outward sweep of the nervous hands.

Frank turned away with a sigh and sat down near the window.

"When you think," continued Lea, standing before him, with her troubled, forget-me-not eyes, "when you think of *how* short life is, how few years we have to be young and pretty and happy in, how, in a few years—think of it! Just five or ten or twelve little miserable years!—we shall be old and ugly and limp and stupid, and narrow-minded and hard-hearted! O, Frank!" and her voice broke into a sob, "I have only one life; this one, little, precious life! Let me make the most of it! let me be happy before I die!" She flung herself at his feet, and the golden ripples of her hair fell loosened over his knee. He stroked the small bent head soothingly.

"Of course, dear," he said, in his quiet, kindly tones, "I want you to be happy. I think it is very wrong of you to go on like this. Haven't you got Flossie——"

Lea started to her feet.

"Yes, I know it! Flossie! Flossie! Flossie! Everything Flossie! I *hate* Flossie!"

"How dare you, Lea? How can you?" cried Frank.

"No! no!" she exclaimed. "I didn't mean that. You know I didn't mean that. But she is growing up and she'll take my place. She will have what I have missed. She will be young when I am old, pretty when I am ugly, alive when I am dead. I shall have to take her out well-dressed and tall and laughing,—and I shall have grey hair, and a bonnet with strings to it and a black silk dress! I see her, I watch her creeping up, growing, and pushing me down into the second place. I don't want her to. I haven't finished, I haven't had what I want! Don't speak to me of Flossie. I want to forget her. I want to think of myself alone."

"Lea," said Frank, slowly and gravely, "what evil influences are at work on your life? Who is it that puts these horrible thoughts into your mind? They are not your own." Lea did not answer. "Who is exciting you to discontent and madness?" repeated Frank. "Is it that Mrs. Werner, who has begun to come about the place again?" Lea shrugged her shoulders scornfully. Frank's face darkened: "Is it—is it that low cad of a Spaniard, who has been here three times in the last fortnight?" Still no answer. "If you associated with nicer people you would take a more rational view of life."

"Oh, yes, I know," said Lea, taking a little piece of paper from the table and tearing it into long, narrow strips. "You want me to break with all my friends, with all who have known me when I was bright, and pretty, and made much of. You want me to run round paying calls to your prim, flat, rational ladies who patronize me and instruct me and set me a good example. Thank you.

I prefer poor old mother Werner and the Spanish cad. They, at least, don't try to improve me,—they like me as I am." Frank made no remark. His face was drawn and haggard. He looked ten years older than when he had entered the room early in the afternoon, fresh from the glad open air, and the keenness of sport and the wholesome smell of his horses. "Ever since we were married," continued Lea, folding the little strips of paper over and over again, "you have been trying to change me and my ways. It has been 'Don't do this,' and 'Don't say that,' and 'Couldn't you try the other?' Four years of fault-findings and corrections!"

"It isn't true," said Frank. "I have never found fault with you or corrected you except in little things—trifles, of no importance!"

"That's just it," said Lea aggrievedly. "If you found big faults or corrected horrible crimes in me I shouldn't care. But this eternal 'Lea, dear, don't be violent before the servants.' 'Lea, darling, don't call men by their surnames alone.' 'My dear, *don't* wear such hats,' and '*Don't* wear such low-cut dresses,' and '*Don't* take your gloves off in the theatre!' Don't, don't, don't! Four years of don'ts. Is it worth while wearing my life out for things of this kind?"

"My dear Lea," began Frank.

"There you are again! 'My *dear* Lea'—always expostulating and reasoning and explaining."

"What would you have me do, in heaven's name?" cried Frank. "All that I do is wrong, all that I say irritates you. Upon my word," and he got up with his hands in his pocket, "I'm sick of the whole thing."

The hot tears rushed into Lea's eyes.

"That's right," she sobbed; "tell me that you are sick of me. Tell me you wish you had never met me!"

Frank stopped before her, and his eyes looked into hers, with the faithfulness of a dog's. "Ah, Lea, when I

met you, how different you were. How bright and cheerful, and pretty! I thought I was bringing living sunshine into the house when you came in on my arm, in your gray travelling dress, four years ago. Lea!" She had turned away, and gone over to the window. The afternoon was fading; the air blew in cool and sweet. "Lea! Don't let us be idiotic. What are we deliberately spoiling our lives for, over nothing at all? Come here, dear; give me your hand, and let us make it up."

She turned round and looked at him. A great sob rose in her throat, and she put her meek white hands in his.

"Mr. Ailar, madam," said the servant, appearing at the open door.

Frank turned brusquely. "We are not at home," he said.

"Oh, Frank," said Lea,—"Mary, wait a moment!—Frank, you can't send him away. He'll be dreadfully offended."

"Nonsense, my dear; he can't be offended at the fact of your being out."

"But he knows I'm in," said Lea. Frank's face grew hard and stern. "He saw me at the window," she explained.

Frank turned to the servant.

"We are not at home, Mary," he said, and the girl disappeared. Lea's face flushed. Frank sat down, and put his hands in his pockets.

"Did you know that fellow was coming to-day?" he asked.

"I did not," Lea answered coldly. There was a pause. Frank surveyed her with a cynical smile.

"You did not dress yourself up so gorgeously for *my* benefit, did you?"

Lea looked up at him. "If I said I did, would you believe me?" she asked.

"No," he answered, and left the room.

So the day ended. What did it matter that Bluebell had won the race, and what did it matter that Lea had looked like "a snow-cloud with summer-blue eyes"? When she slipped the shimmering dress off the rose-gleam of her shoulders that night, a witch's wand had touched the living Pearl and frozen it up again.

And Frank, in his lonely dreams, was riding his life's race with Bluebell, and a huge black steed called Woe was galloping at his side.

XII.

LAZY June crawled bluely across the skies, and stretched over the sea in drowsy loveliness. The sun dropped a net of diamonds on the moving silk of the water; the little feather-frilled waves scampered in and rippled out; and children's bare feet laughed across the sands in mad pink fluttering.

Frank, carrying Flossie on his shoulder, came out of the water; he looked ruddy and bronzed; the child's wet yellow curls rested on his brown head trustingly, and they were laughing together like two good friends. Lea, lying in the sand, watched them with a warm, strange tenderness in her eyes.

"They are mine," she said softly; then she turned to Don Pedro, who was stretched in handsome indolence at her side. "They are mine," she repeated aloud, and her voice was almost angry.

"So are we all, Señora," said he, lifting his heavy lids, and looking her in the face.

"I don't want you all," said Lea, pettishly, and turned away.

Don Pedro filled Flossie's pail with sand, and patted it down with the shovel.

The water was alive with people.

"How hideous we are," said Lea, looking at three fat

women and a thin one, who had joined hands, and were jumping up and down in the water, in wet, uncompromising ugliness.

"Yes," said Don Pedro, gazing at them, "you are."

"Well, so are you, for the matter of that," said Lea—"hideous."

Don Pedro smiled. "Do you think so?" he said. "Surely we are not quite as awful to behold *en déshabille* as the fair sex is."

"You're worse," said Lea, screwing up her nose. "I hate a man who has not his collar and cravat and boots and gloves on. Look at your necks!" she added scornfully.

Don Pedro admitted the horror of them.

"And—and—everything!" she said, in a wide, inclusive manner, that left no room for argument.

"Certainly," said Don Pedro. "Do you insist upon the gloves?" he asked after a while, taking a pair out of his pocket. Lea laughed, and looked down at his bare hands. He held the gloves in his left—his right was stretched out on his knee, with the sun full upon it. It was a long, dark hand; all the nails short, except the little finger's; that had been allowed to grow in Spanish fashion, long and pointed like a claw. It was a hand that spoke. It spoke of slipping, sliding cards; it spoke of runaway, rolling money; it spoke of strong grips and of silent caresses—wise, silent caresses. The blood welled up slowly into Lea's face as she looked at the hand, the dark, passive hand. A sudden mad longing came over her to put her face down, to press her eyes and her mouth to it, to grasp it in her own warm palms, and crush it to her breast.....The long, dark hand lay motionless, like some poisonous creature asleep. She lifted her eyes to his face at last. He was looking at her—deathly pale.

"Oh, my God!" she said, low, low down in her throat, and turned her face away.

XIII.

"DON'T go uptown to day, there's a good boy," said Lea across the lunch table to Frank. The windows were thrown wide open; Flossie was romping on the lawn with the dog, and with two little short-skirted, shrill-voiced children from the cottage next door.

"Why not?" asked Frank, stirring his coffee placidly. "Any special plans for to-day?"

"No," said Lea; "I'd like you to stay here, that's all."

"My dear child, how can I put Morton off?" He'll be up from the stables on purpose to see me," said Frank.

Lea did not answer; she took a lump of sugar, and chewed it pensively; then she repeated: "I wish you wouldn't go—I really wish you wouldn't."

"What an unreasonable creature you are," said Frank. "What do you want of me if I do stay here?"

"Nothing, nothing at all," said Lea briskly. We'll go for a drive; and we'll—we'll just lounge about—and be together."

Frank's brown eyes opened in astonished unbelief. "You don't mean to say you want me to put off seeing Morton, and throw up all my engagements for the pleasure of taking a drive, and lounging about on the beach. What is it? Does the place bore you? I told you it would, before we took the cottage."

"Oh, no, that isn't it," said Lea. "I like the place well enough—it's the people. . . . . "

"That's your own fault, my dear girl. You have the knack of collecting all the objectionable people of the place round you. Now, the really decent set you won't have anything to do with. Why don't you run over to Dora? She knows a whole lot of nice people."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Lea. "I don't like nice people! Dora's friends are appalling. So is she, but she's your sister, and so I mayn't say so. Whenever she leaves off speaking, I always feel as if I must get up and say, 'And

now to God the Father, God the Son'—there! I suppose you're angry."

Frank laughed. "No, I'm not, you silly child. But I must go. I've barely twenty minutes to catch the train. Don't mope, and don't go down to that beastly pier. Take Flossie for a drive, or go and hear poor Dora preach. She means well, which is more than some other people do."

Then he got up, and, bending over her, kissed her forehead lightly. She caught his hand and put her face against his arm.

"Don't go," she said.

He put his hand under her chin, and lifted her face.

"What a goose we are," he said, smiling down into her troubled eyes. "Will my goose do me a favor?" he added.

Lea nodded. He dropped his playful mood, and spoke earnestly.

"I should like you not to allow Ailar to hang round you as he did this morning? I didn't like it," he said.

Lea nodded without speaking.

"I don't trust him," continued Frank, "and I don't like him. I wish, dear, you would drop him altogether."

Lea nodded again. Frank kissed her.

"That's a dear girl. Now, say good-bye."

But Lea held his arm. "Frank, please don't go. I beg you not to go. I promise not to see Ailar any more. I promise anything you like, only stay with me to-day. I don't know what is the matter with me," she said, putting her face against his sleeve again—"it's the summer, and the sun, and the sea-air. I want you to stay with me, and be very kind to me, and listen to all I've got to say!"

"What is it? Is anything wrong? Tell me now."

"Oh, no," said Lea. "It isn't anything like that. It's a lot of things. It's everything." She looked up appealingly. "I want you to see my heart, and to understand me, and calm me!"

"What lyricism!" laughed Frank. "I have never known you in such a Teutonically sentimental vein. Do not be foolish, Lea. I really must go now. You'll tell me all about this on Friday." And he went into the hall for his hat and stick.

Lea stood in the doorway of the dining-room watching him.

"Remember," she said, "I have asked you not to go."

"That sounds threatening," said Frank, good-humoredly.

"Frank," and Lea's eyes were full of tears, "you don't know me—you don't understand me. There are little bits of my soul, little dark corners that you know nothing of. It's not good, it's not right that I should go about with them shut up in me. I want to tell you everything about myself, to-day—at once."

Frank put on his hat and took his stick.

"Lea, don't give way to these morbid, Ibsenistic ideas," he said. "They are unwholesome and absurd." He bent and kissed her hair. "I have not been 'living four years with a stranger,' Lea! I know you through and through. And, as for the dark corners," he added with a smile, "take little Flossie on your lap, and ask her to say 'Gentle Jesus,' or 'How doth the little busy bee,' to you. That will exorcise all the spirits of darkness, and by the light of her young eyes you will see that you have nothing but guardian angels hidden in those fearsome corners of your soul."

Then he went out into the garden, and lifted his child up in his arms. He kissed her little hot face, and her tangled hair, and her dirty little hands. Lea had followed him, and, as he put the child down, laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"Frank, if you care about me——" He had taken out his watch. "By Jove, I shall miss my train!" he exclaimed. "By-bye, Lea; do be sensible. Ta-ta, Flossie," and he was gone.

XIV.

LEA walked slowly back to the house. Her heart was bitter, and her face was hard.

"He does not care, he does not care about me," she said to herself. "All the worse for him—and for me. Oh, I don't know what I'm doing, I don't know what I want!" And she threw herself down on the sofa, hiding her face in her hands. "He would not stay, he would not listen to me. I should have told him everything! All my misery, and discontent, and longing! Longing—empty, weary longing for I know not what! I want to be happy! Why should I not be happy? Why should my heart, and my brain, and my eyes, and my mouth be tortured by this eternal hunger and thirst? Oh, God! If there be such a thing as content, as joy—if happiness exists, reveal it, God—reveal it!"

The maid knocked at the door. "Mr. Ailar, ma'am," she announced.

Lea sat up, looking at the servant with wide, startled eyes. Mechanically, she lifted her tremulous hands and smoothed her hair.

"Show Mr. Ailar in," she said.

He entered, as good to look upon as Antinous, as self-possessed as a king.

"Oh, I am glad you have come!" said Lea.

He lifted her hand to his lips.

"Really glad, Señora? I am deeply grateful."

Lea had found all her smiles again.

"Oh," she said, laughing, "I should have been glad if a friendly cat had walked in, as long as it purred, and didn't come to quarrel with me."

"Even so, I am grateful," said Don Pedro, "and now I am going to purr." He sat down near her; one of the long ribbons of her waistband lay beside her on the sofa, and he took it lightly and tenderly, drawing it through his hands.

"First of all, you are very beautiful."

"Yes," said Lea.

"Secondly, you are very unhappy."

"Yes! Yes! I am!" she said, with conviction.

Don Pedro stroked the ribbon tenderly.

"Will you tell me why?" he said. "What has happened to you, *pobrecita mia?*"

"Nothing has happened. Nothing ever does happen," exclaimed Lea aggrievedly. "I'm just miserable, because I'm not happy, that's all."

"I know it," said Don Pedro gently. "And I told you so—do you remember?—I told you ever so long agc that this kind of life would never make ycu content."

Lea passed her hand over her forehead wearily.

"It's a mistake," she said, talking more to herself than to him—"another mistake. Not that I regret the stage," she added, looking up at him wistfully—"that was not happiness, either. *Fame! Success!* Words that sound like the crash of a big drum, and are just as empty; you don't live on them, you don't feel them, they don't satisfy you! So I thought that marriage might. A happy marriage! Look at it! here it is!" She laughed bitterly, and threw open her arms. "I represent domestic felicity, Don Pedro Admire me!"

"I do, ' said he, letting his eyes wander slowly from the top of her smooth gold head to the tips of her pointed shoes. "I do indeed."

Lea was gazing straight before her, out through the open window, acrcss the breeze-shuddered sea.

"And now," she said slowly, "I see that I am just as far from happiness as I was before—just as far."

Don Pedro bent his dark face closer to her.

"Lea! Four years ago I told you what the only happiness in the world was, and you would not believe me. You struck me with this little hand; you struck me in the face and I took it, so—and kissed it—do you remember? Since then, every time I have tried to speak to

you, you have shut me up, or sent me away. *Love*, Lea, love is the only thing worth living for! Free, unfettered, passionate love, such as I give you from the depths of my passionate heart. How long I have loved you, and followed you, and desired you! Your hair, your eyes, your mouth!—how I have dreamed of them, and longed for them!—and you have known it. Yet, here you sit, with your empty soul, and your cool heart, wondering where happiness is to be found."

Lea looked into the glowing darkness of his eyes, with grave perplexity.

"If I knew it," she said in a low voice, "if I were sure of it! Oh, I am sick with unsatisfied longing, I know not of what." She sat upright, and clasped her hands in passionate earnestness. "I wake up in the night, and think. Let me see—I am twenty-six years old. Four more years and I shall be thirty. Then five more years and I shall be thirty-five, then five more—I shall be *forty!!* Old! dead! done for! And what am I getting out of life? What am I enjoying? Then I feel my heart go thump, thump, thump with dull excitement! I feel as if I must get up and do something wild, something unheard of, immediately, to make me forget how time is passing, and I am getting older, and have not been happy yet! You can't understand me," she added, hopelessly. "A woman would! *Every* woman would. But if no other woman in the world has known how to be happy, I am going to be the first. I am going to be happy before I die!"

Don Pedro took her restless hand, and lifted it to his lips.

"Leave me alone! Let me tell you," she said, drawing her hand away with quick impatience. "When this dreadful restlessness comes to me, and I cannot lie still, and I cannot sleep, I take that murderous little instrument that Jack gave me, and inject morphine into my arms. Look——" she said, drawing back her wide white sleeve, "here, and here—isn't it ugly? Then I go to sleep."

Don Pedro looked in horror at the tiny discolored spots, like the bite of a venomous creature on the bare white arm.

"Lea! Lea!" he cried, pressing her hand to his eyes, "come to me, come with me! I am not rich, I am a gambler, and something of a bad fellow, I dare say, but I love you, and will give your starving soul what it longs for. I will make you happy, Lea,"—he spoke with his mouth close to her ear; his hot breath sent little shudders down the back of her neck—"absolutely, immensely happy! You don't know what it is to be loved by one of us from the South. We have blood, and sun, and fire in our veins, not ice-water, like your English-speaking men! You shall know what it is to live, Lea. Will you come? Will you come with me?"

She raised the blue question of her eyes to his:

"Is that happiness?" she asked. "Are you sure that is happiness?"

"There is no other!" His face was close to hers, his lips almost on her mouth. "Will you come?" he whispered. "Will you come?"

A shrill shriek of laughter pealed in through the open window. The children had tied a sunbonnet on the dog's head, and he was bounding and barking across the lawn.

"No! No!" cried Lea, pushing him away. "What are you talking about? Are you mad, to speak like this? Am I mad to listen?"

But Pedro held both her hands.

"You are mad," he said, "if you close your ears to what I am saying—mad if you close your heart to the joy I would give you. Just look at yourself. A woman with such an immense capacity for happiness, sitting here, wasting her young life and her beauty, and her divine sensitiveness—on what? On a husband who may be a good fellow enough in his way, but who has never known what he had in you, has never appreciated the treasure of

your thrilling nerves, the wonder of your passionate senses! Am I right?"

"Right or wrong," said Lea, in a low, trembling voice, "it is wrong to me. What's done is done."

"No," he cried, "what is done wrong must be undone, and done right. Lea, think your own thoughts; think of this one short, miserable little life of ours; think of your youth slipping, slipping from you. And listen to joy and pleasure calling to you, *Come!* Lea, will you come away with me?"

"No! Oh, no!" said Lea.

"You will come at once—to-morrow or the day after—and we will leave for Barcelona immediately. We will go to my old Palacio on the Rambla de las Flores—all that remains to me of the old family estate—and we will dream our lives away under my Spanish skies in the good old Spanish fashion: '*Amar, amar, amar hasta morir!*' Then we shall go to Nice and Monte Carlo, darling; we will sell the old home, and you shall throw all the gold *louis* they give us for it on the jolly green cloth of the roulette. 'Here goes the first floor and the balconies,' you'll say, when you see the wheel turn and the ball whirl round—'here goes the *piano nobile*, and here goes the roof and the cornices!' *Et vogue la galère!* And when we have nothing left, I shall still have your eyes, and your sweet, sweet mouth. And you have me, body and soul for ever!"

"No! No! No!" sighed Lea, with closed eyes.

"Tell me, when will you be ready? Where shall we meet? I shall wait for you day and night. You know, at old Mrs. Werner's where I am staying——"

"It is useless—useless," she repeated dreamily.

But he bent down, and kissed the back of her neck.

"I adore you," he said.

The maid knocked at the door.

"Miss Norton," she announced, and Frank's sister, a quiet, middle-aged woman with a kind face, entered the room.

"How do you do, dear," she said as Lea rose, and kissed her.

"How are you, Dora? You have met Señor Ailar, I think."

"Yes; oh yes," said Miss Norton, shaking hands with him. Then, turning to Lea again: "I cannot stay, my dear; I am on my way to Villa Louisa. Lady Vere has that meeting, you know, and it is dreadfully late as it is. I have just come to ask you if you won't dine with us to-morrow night. It is an informal little affair, but I think you will like it. We shall have the Farwells and the Mertons, and Lady Vere, and a few other good old friends. Nothing very brilliant or exciting," she added smiling, "but then, we are not all young, and"—with a little sigh—"when we are, it does not last forever. Do come!" She looked round at Don Pedro, who had taken up an album, and was studying the photographs attentively. "I think you owe it to your husband," she said confidentially, "to keep up with his old friends a little. Don't you think so, my dear?"

"Oh, yes, certainly," said Lea.

"Don't dress up, there's a dear girl," continued her sister-in-law; "haven't you got something a little quiet to wear—black silk, or something?"

"Oh, yes," said Lea; "I have the dress I wore at your uncle's funeral."

"Well no, dear, I don't mean that exactly. But we are all quiet people, so don't wear anything very—very fussy," she finished up timorously. Then, lowering her voice, she added: "In fact, if you don't mind my telling you, I don't think, if I were you, I should wear that yellow silk you had on at Mrs. Farwell's reception. I heard people remark on it, and it really is rather—dreadful."

"Dreadful?" repeated Lea, astonished.

Miss Norton coughed timidly.

"Yes—in the back, you know; there seems to be hardly any waist to it at all; just like a broad belt with

two straps to it. I hope you are not offended, my dear child," she said, patting Lea's hand affectionately. "I tell you these things for your good. These ladies have their own ideas as to propriety; and as you *have* to live with them——"

"Yes, I understand. Certainly," said Lea.

Miss Norton turned to Ailar.

"I must beg your pardon," she said, "for monopolizing the conversation, but I am in such a hurry I have no time to be polite. Well, dear, then to-morrow at six. Señor Ailar, good afternoon."

Lea accompanied her to the door. In the hall Miss Norton stopped again.

"You don't mind, Lea, if I tell you one little thing more? Your hair is very becoming like that, but—would it not be prettier done up in a smooth and simple fashion? You know," she said apologetically, "I feel like a mother towards you, and therefore take the liberty of telling you these little things."

"Yes," said Lea.

"I think," said Miss Norton, bent on fulfilling her duty, "you have some powder on your face. Now, do you think, dear, as a Christian woman you are justified in using powder—trying to improve on what nature has given you? There, there, dear; I am sure I have preached dreadfully to-day, and you'll be glad to get rid of such a fussy old woman." She opened the door. "Give my love to dear little Flossie. She has gone to her tea, I suppose," and the kindly brown eyes glanced searchingly round the deserted garden. "Do bring her up to see me when you can," she added. "Good-bye."

Lea watched the little round black figure treading neatly along the garden path. Then she went in and shut the door.

Miss Norton softly closed the garden gate, and tripped out into the street.

"It was very painful to me," she said to herself. "But I have done her good, I know."

XV.

LEA entered the drawing-room, and sat down gloomily in an arm-chair. Don Pedro looked up at her. Neither of them spoke.

"Don Pedro," said Lea, at last.

"Doña Lea," said he. Then there was another pause.

"Do you remember my yellow silk dress, with red roses?" she said.

"Perfectly," said Don Pedro.

She sat up with angry eyes.

"Do you think it dreadful? Did you think I looked indecent and unchristian in it?" Ailar smiled. "Oh, what miserable, small-minded, evil-tongued people they are," she cried. "How I hate them all!"

Don Pedro rose, and held out his hand.

"Well, good-bye," he said.

"Good-bye," she answered, vaguely. "Are you going away?"

"Yes, I am going away," and he kissed her hand. "Try to be happy, poor child; try it in your own way. And do not quite forget me."

"Are you not coming back again?" she asked, with wide eyes.

He shook his head.

"Never?" and her voice was so low that he could hardly hear the word.

He held her hand and spoke: "Why should I torture myself and tempt you? Your path lies here among these people, in these surroundings. It is your fate to live and fade and die in this narrow place with your hard, high walls all round you. I have suffered enough in seeing it," and he ran his fingers through his black curls restlessly. "I am dying for want of the sun and the freedom of other countries myself. So, adios! My dear little friend!"

He lifted her hand again, and kissed it lightly. Then he took his hat and left the room.

Lea stood still. The color faded away from her face and left her like wax. Her lips were white; even her eyes seemed to have paled and faded.

Outside, the hall door opened. Lea put her hands to her heart. "Don Pedro!" she called. Then she went to the door. "*Pedro!*"

He came back almost as pale as she. "At your commands," he said.

Lealooked up into his eyes, her lips moved, but not a sound passed them.

He caught hold of both her hands.

"You will come?" he cried, the wild blood rushing to his face. "You will come, *mi alma! mi vida!*"

But Lea drew away from him and covered her face. "No! no!" she sobbed. "Say goodbye, say goodbye and go."

He went to her, he folded his strong arms round her and held her to his heart. "Lea," he spoke, bending his mouth to her ear, "you will come. You will come of your own accord, because you love me. You have loved me ever since I made you cry that night in the theatre long ago. You loved me when you struck me in the face; you loved me when you called Frank to protect you; you loved me when you married Frank; you love me now. You will come to me and be at peace. My God! My God, Lea! Life is so short—*so short!* Why should we suffer? Why should we deny ourselves? Why should we strangle our instincts and suffocate our desires? We may be dead in a few years! We shall be old and shrivelled up if we live! And who will care that we have sacrificed ourselves to-day? A hundred years hence, when the world is rolling on without us, who will care whether you fell asleep in the evening with your head on my breast, and awoke in my arms in the morning? Oh God! Lea! . . . . in my arms!"

Her frail body trembled against his heart.

"I shall wait for you," he went on rapidly, "day and

night. And you will come—you will come because you love me, and because life is short, and because *I want you.*" He kissed her hair, he lifted up her face and kissed her eyes and her cheeks and her neck, and at last, at last, her mouth!

"Go," she whispered; "go away!" She put her hand against his breast and pushed him from her. "I will never see you again—I hate you."

The hall door closed noisily. Brisk steps sounded in the hall, and Frank, with a bunch of roses in his hand, entered the room.

"Well, Lea," he said cheerfully, and stopped as he saw Don Pedro.

"Ah, Mr. Norton . . . I was just saying good-bye. . . I looked in to inquire after Mrs. Norton's health—and yours," stammered Don Pedro.

"Thank you. We are very well," said Frank, and turned away to place his flowers on the table.

"So I hear with great pleasure," said Don Pedro. "But I will not detain you. I was just taking my leave. Señora"—and he bowed, "Mr. Norton——"

Frank rang the bell, and the servant showed Don Pedro out.

There was a short silence. Then Frank said, "I had asked you not to have anything to do with that fellow."

"I had asked you," said Lea, "not to go up to town to-day."

Frank laughed. "Was the temptation so great that you needed my presence to shield you from it?"

"Was the favor so great that you could not grant it?"

"I did grant it," exclaimed Frank. "I have come back. Here I am. I thought of your face and of your words when I was in the train. They haunted me. I thought I had behaved unkindly to you, so I got out at the second station and took the next train back. I expected to find you in tears—lonely and miserable." He laughed. "*Pas si bête!* The one man in the world I asked you to have

nothing to do with is here in my house, entertaining and comforting you during my absence."

Lea made no answer. She was looking straight before her with her face as white as a sheet. Her silence exasperated him. He wanted her to explain, to justify herself. But she sat quite still, looking before her as if he were not in the room.

"Upon my word, it serves me right," he said, walking up and down the room. "I ought to have known better." Still no answer, and no question. He stopped in front of her. "What was that infernal cad doing in my house, eh? What was he saying? Drawing comparisons between the clean, honest air you breathe with me and the mire you lived in four years ago? Telling you that the mire tasted best?" Lea lifted her heavy eyes to his face, then dropped them again without a word. "I ought to have known better," he repeated. "How should a house like mine suit you, after your theatrical triumphs, and your social successes in your brother's house? How should I expect you to love my sister, to like my friends, to respect me? Blood will tell!" he concluded scornfully.

Still no answer. "It's in the blood," he went on. "Look at your brother—a degraded, vicious brute. Your sister—a little bundle of depravity, who only keeps straight because she thinks that on the whole it pays best. How could anything good, anything healthy, anything clean, spring from the same stock?"

The hopelessness of it all swept over him. "Oh, my God! my God!" he said, and hid his face in his hands.

Lea got up. She stood for one instant looking at the brown, bowed head; a wild, crying desire came over her to fall on her knees and ask him for help, for forgiveness. But he lifted his blurred eyes, and went on in his anger.

"What is it you want? Your home does not please you, your husband does not satisfy you, your child does not interest you. You want low men and loose women round you; late hours, rowdy suppers, noise, whirl and dis-

order!" He flung his arm out as if to throw her from him. "Ah! you have the instincts of the street!"

Lea nodded her head slowly. "Yes," she said, in a low, dreamy voice. "I believe I have. I believe we all have." And she went out of the room.

She went up the stairs slowly and heavily, like an old woman. She went along the corridor until she reached the nursery. The children's voices sounded shrill and happy through the closed door. The neighbor's two little children had stayed to tea.

She opened the door and looked in. They were crawling about on all fours, growling and snarling, with shrieks of laughter between.

"Flossie!" she said. "Flossie!" Flossie crawled up to her with her hair in her eyes and her face flushed, and roared, pretending to be a bear.

"Come, darling," said her mother. "I want you." And she lifted her up in her arms.

"Oh, mamma!" cried Flossie, "put me down! I'm a wild beast!"

"I want you to come with me, darling," said Lea, pressing her face to the little hot cheek. "You shall stay with mamma all day, if you're good. You shall go for a drive with mamma, and have your supper with mamma, and mamma will tell you a beautiful, beautiful story."

Flossie began to whimper. "I don't want a story—I don't want to come! I want to be a wild beast!"

"Won't you come and stay with poor mamma?" urged Lea. "Poor mamma's all alone and wants her little girl."

But Flossie set up a wail of grief, and the nurse said, "For shame, Miss Flossie! See Johnnie and Minnie looking at you."

Flossie kicked and wriggled out of her mother's arms.

"Shall mamma go away all alone?" asked Lea, with a little break in her voice.

"Yes," said Flossie gleefully, going down on all fours again.

No heaven-whispered inspiration sent the little feet running back to her; no wild, sweet instinct urged the little hands to clasp her gown. And Lea turned away from the room and went out, weeping.

But Flossie, with red cheeks and tumbling hair, crawled about on the floor. "We're all wild beasts! we're all wild beasts!" she said.

And she scrambled along and pretended to eat Minnie, who was small and afraid.

XVI.

"WHAT has become of the tooth powder?" asked Don Pedro, coming out of the dressing-room in his shirt-sleeves, with dripping moustache.

"I don't know," said Lea, turning her face to the wall.

"I believe we left it in Calais," said Don Pedro, and went back into the dressing-room, where he continued talking, with intervals of a great deal of splashing and gasping. "This journey has cost us a fortune in umbrellas and tooth powder," he said. "We have dropped gamps and dentifrices all along the road like a kind of dream paper-chase." Lea drew the bedclothes up over her head. "The difficulties that are put in the way of personal cleanliness by these continental hotels are fearful," he continued; "they don't even provide soap. It's a horrible expense to buy soap in every hotel you stop at. They charged 60 centimes for this cake of petrified chocolate at the Lion d'Or yesterday, and we left our sponge bag in Dover; so I wrapped it in a piece of newspaper, and now all the print is sticking to my face."

Lea put her fingers to her ears and shut her eyes.

"Did you put away my brushes?" He was rummaging in the dressing-bag. *Cuerpo de Dios!* There's that spirit lamp curling machine of yours got open, and the alcohol all over the place." He found his two brushes, and stood before the looking-glass, brushing his black curls vigorously.

Lea opened her eyes and looked at him. His back was turned to her; his shoulders were slender and sloping, and his bare neck brown and long.

"My God! How one must love a man not to hate him!" said Lea, and turned her face to the pillows.

"What did you say?" asked Pedro, brushing his beard. She did not answer. "Shall I send up your breakfast, or will you get up?" he asked, buttoning his waistcoat, and fastening his chain.

"I don't want to get up," said Lea.

"All right; what will you have? Café au lait?"

"Yes,—yes," said Lea—"anything."

So he put on his coat, and took his hat, and bent over the bed. *Un besito?*" he said. "*No? Bien, bien, como tu quieres,*" and he left the room.

A few moments passed. Then Lea sat up. With quick, nervous hands she drew a small bottle and a tiny leather case from under her pillow. Little shivers were running through her, her fingers twitched and her lips trembled.

"I thought he would never go," she muttered. She opened the case, and drew out the little silver-mounted syringe, and the needle—the sharp, shining needle that her flesh loved. She opened the bottle, and rapidly filled the syringe, drawing back the slender piston, and letting the small glass serpent suck in the limpid poison.

Higher and higher she drew the tiny, scaled rod . . . 15 . . . 20 . . . 25, and the hollow steel mouth of the needle drank up the deadly drug. She corked the bottle, and hid it under her pillow again. Then she turned the needle point upward, and gently pushed a drop of the precious liquid from it. Slipping her left arm out of her nightdress, she took a fold of her tender flesh, almost at the back of her neck, between her forefinger and thumb, then quickly, fiercely thrust the sharp point into it.

A little gasp of pain and pleasure, and the poison was spurted into her blood. She withdrew the needle,

and pressed her thumb on the tiny puncture. Then she replaced the syringe in its case. It had done its work.

Nothing was to be seen on the white skin save a little point, like the sting of a gnat—but the milky juice of the poppies was coursing through her veins; her pulse and her breathing slowed; a great weariness sank on her body with the weight of a giant's caress; and she lay back on her pillows, with weary lids drooping over her contracting pupils.

Pearls of perspiration gathered on her forehead, and rolled down her face—a vague, swinging faintness overcame her—then all things faded—faded—fell. She slept.

XVII.

It was early in the afternoon when the hall-boy woke her by knocking at the door. He handed in a tray with a card on it. With damp, languid fingers, Lea took it. and read the name—Sapho d'Arcy.

"Show the lady up," said Lea.

Sapho entered, as pale and as boyish as ever.

"*Tiens, tiens, tiens ma colombe! Je t'ai tout de suite reconnue hier soir,*" she said, kissing Lea's fingers, "*et toi aussi, n'est-ce-pas? Mais pardi, avec moi il n'y a pas à se tromper!*"

Lea laughed.

"Oh, yes, I recognized you, although at first, in the box, I took you for a boy. And you knew me directly?"

"Well, I saw Ailar first," said Sapho. Lea flushed. "*Du reste*, you haven't changed. Just a little puffy about the eyes, that's all. How is everyone? I heard about you from the Werners."

"Don't speak to me about Mrs. Werner. I shall never forgive her," said Lea, in a low voice.

"Why, what had she to do with it?"

"She might have stopped me!" cried Lea. "One word would have sent me back—one word, and she did not

speak it. She pushed me on..... she encouraged me .... she justified me to myself."

"*Eh bien, ma chérie,*" said Sapho, lying back in her chair, "we only live once. What if you did take the plunge? So long as you are happy——"

"Happy!" cried Lea, sitting up in her pillows with dark, desolate eyes. "Happy, you say? But I am wretched, I am miserable, I am broken-hearted! Happy! What is there in the world that will make one happy? Tell me, Sapho, if you know it, tell me!"

Sapho smiled faintly. "We each make for ourselves our own little heavens, or our own little hells, according to which we prefer," said Sapho. "We sit in our little heavens, and play our little harps, and say 'What angels we are!' or we writhe in our little hells, and feed our little fires, and say, 'Are we not devils?' And we are happy in either way. But if you have chosen hell, bury your head in the coals and do not lift your eyes to the chill white of heaven; do not let the watery sound of the harps reach your ears through the roaring of flames. And if you have chosen heaven, fold your white wings over your eyes, lest the shine of red-dancing perdition should lure you to its depths. I have chosen hell." Sapho lowered her voice, and bent over to Lea with gloom-veiled eyes. "A wonderful hell of beauty, and eternal longing, and never-to-be-satisfied desire! But I close my eyes when heaven, with its white-robed angels and laughing child-faces, passes me in the street. If you have chosen Passion, do not look back at Tenderness, do not look forward to Love. Hell or Heaven—abide by it."

"Oh, Senorita!" exclaimed Don Pedro, entering. "How do you do? They told me downstairs that a lady had called, and I wondered who it could be. We were delighted to see you in the theatre last night. It carried us back, years back, to the jolly times in Lester's house. What a jolly set we were! I wonder what has become of all the others!"

"Do you write to Jack?" asked Sapho, turning to Lea, and stroking her hand tenderly. Lea shook her head. "Of course, you know about Dottie——"

"That she's married?" said Don Pedro. "Yes, we heard about that."

"*Paraît qu'elle a choisi le paradis, celle-là,*" said Sapho, with a smile to Lea. "I hear that she is very kind to the two little girls, and that her husband adores her."

"She was a wonderful little person," laughed Pedro; "she had seen so much, and she knew everything. I was afraid at one time *qu'elle dégringolerait.*"

"*Jamais de la vie,*" cried Sapho; "she saw too clear for that. She weighed all she knew on the scales of her common sense, and decided in favor of a husband's honest, every-day love, and the devotion of children—even of those not her own. She may be right, for all we know." Then seeing Lea's face, she changed the subject. "Do you know who is in Paris? *Je vous le donne sur mille!* Some of the old set, Lea. Guess."

But Lea gave it up, and Don Pedro guessed wrong. So Sapho told them.

"Edmund Vane—you remember, the Æsthete! He has gone into partnership with the Poet, and they sell second-hand bicycles. They give away autograph poems by celebrities, and locks of hair of well-known criminals with every bicycle. The poems are by the Poet, and the hair is the Æsthete's; they are doing a roaring trade, and are as fat as quails. Let us invite them to dinner to-night, shall we?"

So Lea got up and dressed, and they drove to the Chaussée d'Antin to find their old friends.

With loud rejoicing they all got into the carriage, and went to Voisins. They took a warm, glaring room *au premier*, and had a long, hot, complicated, noisy dinner, which lasted until eleven o'clock. By that time Don Pedro was talking Spanish to the Poet, Lea was reciting

Phédre, and Sapho, with her arm round the Æsthete's neck, was saying: "*Je t'aime, va! Tu es presque une femme!*"

Then they ordered supper, and began with oysters and *bisque d'écrevisses* all over again.

At the *rôti*, Lea had quarreled with Sapho; the Poet was begging to be allowed to punch Don Pedro's nose; and the Æsthete had put his head down on his plate, and was asleep in the mashed potatoes.

XVIII.

"*Messieurs, faites vos jeux.*"
"*Le jeu est fait.*"
"*Rien ne va plus.*"

THE changeless monotone of the croupier's voice, and the chink-chink of the money reached Lea's ears as she stood on the balcony of the Salle à Musique, looking out over the sea. She had a pink muslin dress, and a hat trimmed with daisies.

"*Trente-six—trente-deux!*" from the trente-et-quarante table. "*Dix-sept; noir, impair et manque,*" from the roulette. And through it all, incessant, maddening, the chink-chink, chink-chink, chink-chink of the money. At her feet, like a lake in the gardens, lay the Mediterranean, so blue, so beautiful as to make one think *le bon Dieu* had put it there by special arrangement with the Administration du Cercle des Etrangers, as another inducement, another decoy, another gratuitous entertainment for the visitors to Monte Carlo.

Stretching its green round tongue into the water, the *tir au pigeon* flung its white-breasted birds into the air; the quick, double shots of the guns rang out, and brought them down again. The long-eared, low-tailed dogs bounded

forward, and took the wounded pigeons in their mouths, worrying them, and shaking them all the way back across the trodden grass.

Full, steady sails against the azure background of the sky; sweeping, swirling, smiling cocottes in the gardens; the gamblers, dumb, deaf and blind to everything but their game, in the room at her back. Don Pedro was there too, trying his new system.

Lea's cerulean eyes plunged into the hollow blue of the skies.

"I wonder where Flossie is!" she said to herself, with a hard, thick feeling in her throat, as if someone had thrust a fist down it. "I suppose she is quite tall, and knows how to read, and her hair will have grown long—little Flossie!"

"*Tout va aux billets. La masse est assurée. Rien ne va plus.*" Chink-chink, chink-chink, chink-chink.

"She is four years old. I suppose her father takes her out for walks, holding her hand. I suppose he takes her into cake-shops, and lets her eat sweets that are not good for her. Then they come out again, and he takes her hand, and they walk home."

"*Trente-deux—Refait!*"

"I wonder whether she dines with him. Perhaps he has dinner at the club. So she is left alone with Hannah all the evening. I never liked Hannah much. She had a hard mouth. I suppose she is quite stern to baby—stern!!"

"*Le jeu est fait. Rien ne va plus—Zéro.*"

"I suppose she is severe with the child. She looks as if she liked to be severe, to find fault, and snub, and correct, and punish. . . . Oh God! God! God! And Flossie alone with her all the evening! Every evening—alone with her!—Only four years old!" . . .

And Lea stood shaking with sobs, weeping in her pink muslin dress, and her hat trimmed with daisies.

XIX.

THE system had burst. They left their suite at the Hôtel de Paris, and took a bedroom and dressing-room at the Hôtel des Colonies.

Don Pedro had another system which was an absolute certainty, but there was not much money left to play it with. So Lea, one afternoon, walked up the palm-shaded, hyacinth-bordered road that leads to the Crédit Lyonnais, past the large gray building, and to the right, up the steep, narrow street to the dirty little Mont de Piété.

There she passed all her jewels in through the tiny window, and left them.

Don Pedro was careful. He told her that he owed it to her to be careful; so he staked five franc pieces instead of *louis*, and took fewer absinthes at the Café de Paris, and no more English chops in the American Grill Room.

Then the new system burst.

Lea packed up the boxes, and a *porte-faix* carried them down to the Condamine. In that hot and drainy locality, they took two rooms in the Hôtel de France; and there Don Pedro spent his days testing another brand-new, infallible system on a small roulette-wheel and an oil-cloth tapis.

But Lea painted her face and went out. Up the steep oleander-lined road that leads to the Casino she went each day, with fluttering dress and shining hair, and sad, sick mouth. In the Casino, everyone knew "la petite Américaine," who volunteered advice, and often hit on the right série and changed a losing gambler's luck. Two young Englishmen—nice, clean-faced boys—called her their "Mascotte," and gave her a third of their stakes every time they won, sometimes even when they didn't.

One day Lea was standing behind a woman's chair, watching the game with listless eyes. The woman in front of her was losing—losing—losing. Lea could see noth-

ing but her broad round back, and her hair dyed red, and her white lace bonnet.

The green jaws of the *roulette* were swallowing her stakes one after the other, gold and notes, gold and notes, in wide, insatiable hunger.

Lea bent over her, and said:

"*Jouez l'intermittence. À noir maintenant.*"

The woman did not even turn round. She nodded slightly, and drawing back her stakes from *impair* and a *transversale*, she pushed the whole heap over to black. Black won.

"*À rouge*," said Lea in a low voice. "*La masse.*"

The croupier's rake pushed the money across, and the woman's trembling hand drew it over to red.

"*Suivez, suivez l'intermittence*," whispered Lea. And the game swung backward and forward from black to red with the regularity of a pendulum. At the eleventh *coup*, the woman with the red hair turned round.

"*Que faire?*" she whispered. "*Encore? Croyez-vous?*"

"*Je ne sais plus*," said Lea. And the woman withdrew her stake. She had won 52,000 francs.

She rose and left the table, beckoning to Lea to come with her.

"*Vous êtes Anglaise?*" she said, sitting down on the round centre-couch, and making room for Lea beside her.

"*Américaine*," said Lea.

"I can speak English a little," said her new acquaintance. "I am the Comtesse Vitali. I stay at the Continental. Come and see me."

Lea thanked her.

"What shall I give you for your teep, I think you call it a teep? You are not a professional teeper, are you?"

Lea shook her head.

"Will you have fifty louis? You deserve more, but I live expensively. And you might just *aussi bien* have made a mistake."

"Yes," said Lea

The Comtesse Vitali drew two five hundred franc notes from the little velvet bag that was bursting with gold and bank notes in her hand.

"Keep, my beautiful," she said, giving them to Lea. "And let that they bring you luck. Come and have a *soda champagne* with me at the Café de Paris." And they went out into the sunlit afternoon.

"Where do you lodge?" asked the Comtesse, blinking her tinted lids at Lea. "Hôtel de France? I don't know. Where is?—à la Condamine? Grand Dieu! You have had then a system? Well, I am your friend if you like. I believe you bring the *veine*. Will you drive with me to Beaulieu to-morrow? I find two gentlemen very good, very well—*très bien*, I mean—to come with. All right! *Adieu, chère belle.*"

Lea went down to the little Hôtel de France. Don Pedro was looking out of the window, and saw her coming.

"Well?" he said, with an interrogative outward turn of both hands, as soon as she was within hearing.

Lea nodded.

When she got upstairs, he was standing on the landing.

"How much?" he asked eagerly.

"Five hundred," said Lea.

"*Caramba, chiquita mia! Tu es maravillosa!*" and he went in, rubbing his hands.

That evening Lea went up to the Casino again, but did not enter the gambling rooms. She went up the wide, soft-carpeted stairs to the left of the vestibule, and stepped into the reading-room.

She sat down at a vacant desk and wrote.

* * * * * * * * *

Twelve days later in New York, the postman dropped a letter in at the basement window of a boarding-house in Thirty-eighth Street.

"It's for the doctor; take it up," said the landlady to

her thin niece, who did the housework. The thin niece took it up to the parlor, and knocked.

"Hulloa," growled Jack from the inside.

"A letter," said the thin niece. Jack came to the door and took it.

When he saw the stamp and the handwriting, he said to the thin niece: "Hold on a minute."

He fetched a quarter out of the bottom of his pocket, and gave it to her. The girl ran away, lest he should change his mind.

Jack locked the door, and opened the letter.

A yellow bill of five hundred francs, French money, fluttered out of it. He did not pick it up. He sat down all in a heap on the shabby sofa, and read his sister's letter.

"Dear Jack:

"If you have not got many patients, and if you are not too angry with me, will you please come here and take care of me? I am ill and miserable. Not ill to have to stay in bed, but ill to wish I were safely dead. I send you five hundred francs. Perhaps you will have to come second class, but, dear Jack, do not be so dreadfully selfish as not to come on that account. This is a lovely place, and you will like it. But if you come it is because I want you to, not because the place is pretty.

"Pedro is here. I will send him away directly you come. I promise I will. We have no more money, but I can always pick up two or three louis at the tables (that is ten or twelve dollars), so we shall not starve. Oh, do come, dear Jack. Do come by the next boat. Boulogne is the cheapest way. If you see Dot, give her my love. I am glad she likes the children. I was afraid she wouldn't get on with them—the eldest was such a little vixen. I know you do not see Frank or Flossie. How unkind of him! As if you were to blame for my misdeeds! Jack, please, please pack up directly, and come to your loving sister,

"Lea."

"*Une dépêche pour Madame,*" said the waiter, handing Lea the small brown envelope.

When Pedro came in five minutes later, Lea was in a dead faint on the floor. He picked up the telegram that lay near her, and read it.

"All right. Seen Flossie. Bought her a forty dollar doll. Coming steerage.

"Jack."

XX.

"THAT coffee ready?" asked Jack, stretching himself on the sofa, and putting his feet on the back of a chair.

"No," said Lea.

They were in the *salon*, as the Hôtel de France grandiosely designated the smallest of the two small rooms Lea and Don Pedro occupied. Pedro sat near the window with his roulette-wheel on a little table, and large sheets of paper with squares drawn on them beside him.

Lea, in a showy dressing-gown, blue silk stockings, and untidy slippers, was boiling coffee on a spirit lamp, with a cigarette in her mouth.

"34!—red again," said Don Pedro, making a note of it in a little book, and drawing lines that looked like barometrical observations in the little squares on the paper. "That makes a succession of eleven reds. If only this were at the tables, and I had my money on it. Eleven reds! Here goes again—" and he turned the wheel. "Of course, I leave it all on, and follow up the winning color.—5!—red again, *por Dios!* Do you see that, Lea? I should have won 12,000 francs on this card alone. All those other systems are not worth a dish of *garbanzos!* Your 'parolis' and your 'd'Alamberts,' your 'Urbaines' and your 'voisins!' This is the system, my dear girl, this is the system that will bring us in millions! Millions!"

"We can do with less," sneered Jack. "Lend us twenty francs to begin with."

"I have not got twenty francs," said Don Pedro, with dignity. "I have not one franc in my possession, as you know, or I should not be here fooling with a toy roulette instead of at the casino, stuffing my pockets with money—stuffing them with it! *Madre de Dios*, what a system this is! And not one centime in my pocket to play it with!"

"Still to us at twilight
"Comes the old sweet song"

hummed Lea, with her cigarette between her teeth.

"Not one centime," continued Pedro. "In fact," he added, looking up, "unless Lea has some money hidden away that I know nothing about, we shan't have supper to-night. These people insist upon the little formality of payment before they give us any more meals. 17, *noir impair et manque*. So I must put ten louis on black; it's bound to come up! You watch this, Jack," he said, turning the wheel.

The ball spun round and round, and then clattered down into the centre.

"Now, you'll see." The ball settled and spun round silently with the wheel. "35!—red," said Pedro, stopping it. "Well, I lose—but that doesn't matter."

"No," said Jack; "when one's not going to have supper anyway, a little thing like that doesn't make much difference."

"The principle is right," said Pedro severely. "Now, of course, I double on red."

The coffee was made and poured out. Lea carried a cup over to Jack, and put it on a chair beside him.

"Pedro, do you want coffee?" she asked.

Pedro nodded.

"27, impair——"

"Black?" asked Lea, with the milk-jug in her hand.

"No, red," he answered absently. Lea laughed. "Eh? Oh yes! It's all the same," and he drew another little line in the squares, and made another little note in his book. Lea came up with the coffee. She was about to put it down near his papers.

"*Maldicion!*" cried Pedro. "What are you doing? Take that cup away. Put it down somewhere else. Can't you see I don't want this table touched?"

Jack turned round and looked at him. Lea drew a chair up near the table, and put the cup on it. Then she went listlessly back, and entered the bedroom, leaving the door open behind her.

Jack sat up.

"What was that you said just now?" he asked suavely of Pedro.

"About the system?" Pedro eagerly enquired.

"No. About the cup," roared Jack. "Don't let me hear you blackguarding my sister, you damned Spaniard!"

Pedro may no reply. Jack tasted his coffee, then he called:

"Lea! Lea!"

"Well?" said Lea, coming to the door, with a grey dress in her arms, at which she seemed to be working. She had a thimble on her finger, and a long-threaded needle stuck in the front of her dress.

"Sugar," said Jack, and watched her as she fetched the sugar basin and brought it to him.

"What are those rags you are always carrying about in your arms?" he asked.

"It's a dress," said Lea, helping him to three lumps.

"For a Plymouth sister?" he enquired.

"No, for me."

Jack gave a sigh of affected relief.

"I was afraid you had some new form of disease—perverted instinct of maternity——"

Lea turned to go back into the bedroom. Jack called her.

"Cognac," he said, tapping a finger against the cup of coffee.

"There is none," replied Lea.

"Why, who drank it?"

"I did," said she.

Jack looked at her with troubled eyebrows.

"Are you taking to that, too?"

Lea laughed bitterly.

"I'm taking to everything—to anything!"

"Bring me the sugar, Lea," said Don Pedro, pushing aside his papers, and taking his cup from the chair. Lea took up the sugar-basin, but Jack caught her by the wrist.

"If you *dare* to wait on that dog!" he snarled.

Pedro walked across the room, and fetched the sugar for himself.

"Dogs can bite, my friend," he said to Jack.

"And dogs can be shot, my friend," said Jack, looking back at him, with wicked eyes.

"Tra-la-la-la! Tra-la-la!" sang Lea, putting her arm round Jack's neck, and her hand on his mouth. "Why don't you go out for a stroll, Jack, and get an appetite, a nice, big appetite for some future meal? Why, perhaps we shall have breakfast one of these days. Just think of it! A real breakfast! Chocolate and brioches, and boiled eggs, and cold ham, and toast—and little round pats of butter! *Mm!* How hungry I am! I'll help you on with your coat."

And she fetched his light overcoat, and made him get up and put it on. Jack was still staring at Pedro; then he turned suddenly, and said to Lea in a low voice:

"Lea, I'm a bad lot, but you ought not to make me sit and spit at myself all day for being a worse hound than *that* is!" He clenched his fists, as he glared at Pedro's calm profile. "What do you keep me here for? What do you tie my hands and feet for, when I want to kick

him out and stamp on him? What are you degrading me for, by insisting that I should stay here, and see you—going to the devil as fast as you can?"

"Jack! Jack! Don't leave me!" whispered Lea, clinging to his large hand. "You know how ill I am! You know I can't do without you! Don't leave me, Jack!"

"Then get rid of him."

"I'm going to, I'm going to," she said.

The waiter knocked at the door, and handed in a letter.

Lea sprang forward and took it.

"Is it for me?" asked Pedro. Lea did not answer.

She stood still, looking at the letter with white lips and sudden dark circles about her eyes. Then she put her hands together with the paper between them.

"Our Father!" she said, and opened the letter.

Jack watched her. He saw the blood rush back to her face, and her eyelids quiver. Then she placed the letter in the bosom of her dress, and turned to him.

Great, quick tears were rolling down her face, but she was laughing, as she put her hand on his.

"Come here," she said, drawing him with her across the room. She took him into the bedroom, and shut the door.

Pedro lifted his eyes and looked after them.

"*Bobos!*" he said under his breath, and went on with his game.

Lea had drawn Jack to the window, and was holding his hand.

"Jack," she said.

"Go on."

"Jack—I have written!" she said, in a breaking voice.

"You have?" he cried. "To Frank? Was that from him? Is he coming?"

Lea nodded and nodded. The tears still rained over the sunshine of her smiles.

"When?" asked Jack, excitedly.

"To-morrow!" cried Lea, with a great sob. "He is in London. He will be here to-morrow night! Oh, Jack—I'm afraid!!"

"Lea," said Jack, putting both his heavy hands on her shoulders, "that was a healthy move. Now," he added, nodding his head towards the closed door, "disinfect the rooms."

"I'm going to!" said Lea, clasping her hands—and she looked about fifteen years old—"I'm going to have a regular cleaning-up. To-morrow I'm going to put away all this"—with a wave of her hand towards the flashing evening dress that was flung across the chair, and her fans, and her yellow satin shoes—"to give it away and get rid of it. I'm going to sweep out the refuse," with another wave in Don Pedro's direction. "I am going to wash my face, clean! with a lot of cold water—wash all the rouge and powder off it. And my hair! I'll brush it back tight behind my ears, and wear it in a little knot down here. And this is the dress I shall put on—look at it!" and she held the little grey dress up before him, holding it by the helpless sleeves like a crucified nun. "You see how sober and calm it is, with little white cuffs and collar, like a Sister of Mercy. He shall find me pale, and tidy, and clean, and good."

"That's all tommy-rot," said Jack. "Get that man out of the place; that's what you've got to do. There shall be no more 'tra-la-la-la's,' mind you. I give you half an hour to bundle him out, and, by Jove, if you haven't done it by the time I come back, Ill take him by his little Spanish nose and drop him out of the window. I'm *aching* to get at him!" and Jack strode towards the door. Lea held him back.

"Jack, you promised—you promised when you came, for my sake, that you would not make scenes. I've always told you I would send him away myself."

"Well, why haven't you done so?" growled Jack.

"I don't know! I don't know. I was always waiting, hoping for I don't know what! I know it was wretched.

and weak-minded and vile of me. But I hardly dared hope that Frank would come. . . . and I have been putting off the inevitable scene, like a coward, from day to day!"

"What did you tell Frank?"

"I don't know," said Lea helplessly. "It was three weeks ago, you remember? I was so ill and wretched, I thought I was going to die. I don't know what I wrote!"

"Did you mention me?" asked Jack.

"Oh, yes! I told him I was with you; that you had been here nearly two months."

"And——?" He nodded his head towards the sitting-room door.

"Ah, no, no! I never said a word, except that I was with you, and ill, and poor, and miserable."

"In God's name, kick him out—the hound!" said Jack. "Do you want Frank to come and find him here?"

He had his hand on the door. Lea held his arm.

"Let me send him away," she whispered. "Don't let us have any noise, and fight, and scandal. It's all over now, Jack. I'll send him away myself, at once. He'll go; I know he'll go," she concluded, reassuringly.

"So do I know he'll go," said Jack. Then he opened the door, and added sweetly, "Let him take his time about it! He has got thirty full minutes to clear out in."

He strode into the room, and took up his hat. He planted it at the back of his head, and lit one of Pedro's cigarettes; then he swaggered up to the roulette-wheel.

"Good-bye, dog," he said to Don Pedro. "Good-bye, Fido! Towzer! Gyp!" And he spat into the roulette-wheel.

Pedro started up.

"Lie down, sir!" snarled Jack, and slammed the door in his face.

XXI.

LEA burst out laughing.

"Do you expect me to stand this?" cried Don Pedro, his handsome face livid with anger.

Lea, still laughing, was lying back on the sofa.

"I should not be surprised if you did," she said.

"Curse his impudence; what does he mean by it? Isn't he here, living with us, like the cowardly cur he is himself? Isn't he living on us——"

"Eh?" said Lea, looking up.

"On *you*, then, more's the shame! Doesn't he let you beg and borrow stray louis at the tables? Does he not countenance the life you lead by his very presence here?"

"He is here because I begged him to come," said Lea.

Pedro sneered. "A lot of good he's been to you! What does he do all day, but take morphine to send himself to sleep, and coffee to wake himself up with?"

Lea sighed wearily.

"He isn't much good, but he's better than nothing," she said.

"*Nothing!* That's me, I suppose," sneered Pedro.

"Oh! You!" Lea paused. She was looking down, rolling and unrolling a cigarette between her fingers.

Pedro walked angrily up and down the room.

Lea lifted her eyes and looked at him. Then she spoke in a high, slow voice:

"There is only one happiness—Love! There is only one love—Passion! There is only one passion——" She burst out laughing, with her hands stretched out towards him—"*Yours!*"

Pedro stopped.

"I see nothing to laugh at," he said. "I *did* love you. We were happy——"

"Never!" burst out Lea. "Never! Not one day, not one hour! From the shameful moment I came into

your sordid, miserable room, into the house of that vile woman who had known me when I was a little child, and who yet pushed me on to my doom—into your arms—through all the degrading vicissitudes of the past year, never have I been happy an hour, an instant—never!"

Pedro was very angry.

"My sordid, miserable room!" he exclaimed, indignantly. "You knew I was a poor devil before you came. It's no good throwing that into my face now."

"Oh!" cried Lea. "It isn't the poverty of the surroundings. It was what I came for, what I sinned for—passion itself that lied to me. Passion, happiness, indeed!" she exclaimed scornfully. "Why, there is no such thing as passion, when it is gratified! It is hunger, and dies when it is fed, thirst that does not exist when it is quenched. Passion is a prayer that should never be granted!"

"*Eh, là là,*" said Pedro. "What's done is done."

Lea smiled wanly. "Oh, my old words! Rising up like ghosts, and looking me in the face!"

"When you are in this mood," said Pedro, sitting down angrily at his roulette-wheel, "I cannot understand you." He turned the wheel, and set the ball spinning.

Lea looked at him for some time without speaking. Then she said quietly, as a matter of course:

"You are tired of me, too."

Don Pedro's shoulders rose imperceptibly.

"No. Oh, no!" he said. "Why should I be tired of you?—16, *noir, pair et manque.*"

Then Lea said, very slowly and measuredly:

"I have written to Frank."

"What!" exclaimed Don Pedro, starting round and dropping his pencil.

Lea repeated the words.

"You have?" he said, in blank astonishment. "What for? Money?"

Lea laughed.

"No; for forgiveness."

"*Por Cristo y la Virgen!*" said Don Pedro, leaning back in his chair, and twirling his moustache. "What are you going to do with that?"

"Buy a new life with it," said Lea.

Pedro whistled derisively; but she went on, talking to herself, flushing warmly, deeply as she spoke:

"A new life! A new life! If he forgives me, I shall take it as a sign—as a sign from Heaven itself! And I shall believe in all good things! I shall believe in God, and in heaven . . . . in the forgiveness of sins—" she leaned back and covered her face—"and life everlasting."

Pedro was looking at her with his head a little on one side.

"I hate to disturb your religious reverie," he said, "but am I to understand that he is coming here?"

Lea nodded.

"When?" inquired Pedro blandly.

Lea started up with overflowing eyes.

"To-morrow!" she cried. "To-morrow! To-morrow."

Pedro leaned back in his chair with his hands in his pockets.

"What are you going to do with me?"

Lea laughed. "Why, Fido—" then she covered her mouth with repentant hand. "You'll go away to-night," she ended quietly.

But Pedro had got up with threatening gesture, and caught her by the wrist.

"Lea, if you were a man—" he said, with his black-bearded face close to hers.

"You'd let me go," said Lea, holding up the wrist that he was grasping.

He threw her arm from him.

"You fling mud at yourself by insulting me," he said, turning away.

Lea covered her face.

"Oh, I know it, to my shame—I know it!"

"What do you expect me to do?" went on Pedro, indignantly; "to stay here and have my brains blown out? Or try my luck at killing him?"

"No! No! You are going away! You are going to leave me, now, at once!"

Pedro raised his long, black eyebrows.

"Altogether?"

"Altogether!" she said under her breath. "For ever! For ever!"

"So? Is that it?" and Pedro gave a little nasal laugh. Then he said:

"May I ask what made you write? I think I might have known something about it before now."

"That you should sneer at me if he had not answered, or had refused to come? No, Señor!" said Lea, with clear, angry eyes. "What made me write? *You* ask it, who have seen me day after day sink and sicken with weariness, disgust and humiliation? How much longer were we to keep up this farce of a love affair?"

"La-la-la!" cried Pedro. "What big words! Put it simply as it is. You have tired of me, just as you tired of the stage, just as you tired of your husband and your home. What is your next experiment to be? God and Religion!!" He burst out laughing. "So I can go. Ah, Señora mia! I don't care! I am as glad to be rid of you as you are to shake me off. I am as tired of your caprices as you are of my indifference!"

Lea passed her hands over her face, wearily.

"Yes, yes, Don Pedro. I believe you."

"Go?" he cried. "Why, of course I'll go! What do I care for any woman in the world, when I have millions here!" And he brought his fist down on his papers with a crash, so that the tremulous wheel quivered and shook. "Can I not buy any woman in the world? Are they not all for sale? If you bid high enough!"

He began stuffing his papers into his pockets as he spoke, getting ready to leave.

"Pah! They are not worth it. Give me a barefooted peasant-girl from Cataluña, or a poor *chiquilla* from the darkest *calle* of Madrid, for real passion, sentiment and devotion! And you'll find more truth and love in her ignorance than in all your Saxon subtlety and humbug. Oh, I know your type, the Burne-Jones, Gabriel-Rossetti woman, always trying to find a background for her profile; always trying to discover new poses for her body, and new vices for her soul. Religion! Why, your religion will be as much a vice with you to-morrow as your champagne, your morphine and your lover have been to-day! Simply a new emotion, a new necessity, a new vice!"

He took up his hat and brushed it. Then he put it on, and lit a cigarette.

"*A Dios!*" he said, and walked up to where she was sitting. He held out his hand to her and laughed. "*A Dios.* See that that roulette-wheel doesn't get broken. I'll send for it to-morrow, or," he corrected, "perhaps better to-night. It is my mascot. I shall have it framed in gold, and hung in my Palacio, between Gobelin's tapestries and" he laughed "and Rossetti's paintings! I shall have thirty-six negro servants, half of them dressed in red, and half in black, to wait on me, to remind me of the roulette, that divinest of mistresses! And you, and your brother, and your child will come creeping and crawling up my stairs, creeping and crawling, to beg money of me." He laughed again, and held out his hand. "*A Dios.*"

Lea put her listless hand in his.

"Good-bye."

Pedro held it.

"So this is the end of it?" he said. "On my word, it touches the emotional side of my Spanish nature. After nearly a year, eh, Lea?"

Lea nodded.

"And now: '*A Dios!*' 'Good-bye!' 'Send me my things.' *Y buenas noches!* . . . . Do you mean it, Lea?"

Lea lifted her troubled eyes to his.

"I am sorry," she said.

"For what? For what?" cried Pedro, dropping her hand. "For me? For yourself? For the past year?"

"I don't know. For everything," said Lea, sadly.

"You can't say I dont take my *congé* well," said Pedro. "No scenes, no noise, no reproaches!" He paused. "You say 'Go!' I go." He was looking down at her small, sad head. He had something else to say, and was thinking of how to say it.

"By the way," he murmured, finally, "I am going to ask you a favor—it is the last one."

"What is it?" said Lea.

But Pedro seemed slightly embarrassed.

"Guess!" he said. "Help me out. It's not exactly a dignified thing to ask——"

Lea's quick lashes lifted.

"What is it?" she asked, softly. "Am I to give you something?"

Pedro nodded.

"Something of mine?"

What could it be? She looked at her little bare hands —no ring was on them, save the tiny silver-gilt guard that had belonged to Frank's mother. She had not pawned that because it was worth nothing.

She looked up at him, helpless and perplexed. Then, with a quick smile, she drew a tiny chain and locket from her neck, and held it up.

"This?" she asked, almost shyly.

"Well, no," Pedro said, pulling at his beard. "Not exactly. Of course, I shall be very glad to have it if you will give it to me . . . . but what I really wanted . . . . It isn't because I'm hard up, you know . . . . I don't

mind about that. But what I do care about is my system. I can't stake my word of honor . . . ."

Lea's eyes had grown wider and wider with astonishment as he spoke. Little by little, as she understood him, a great, clear smile broke over her face.

Then she burst into a peal of laughter.

"Why, it's *money* you want!!" she cried.

"Well, yes, it is," said Don Pedro, and laughed too.

Lea drew Frank's letter from the bosom of her dress. She opened it and took some money from between its sheets.

"Why, of course," she said. "There! There are ninety louis—I've got ten left. Frank sent them to me." And she laughed again, a little wildly.

"Just think of my offering you my portrait in a little locket not worth three francs!" And they both laughed at the idea until tears stood in their eyes.

"Well, you know," gasped Pedro, overcome by hilarity, and putting the money into his pocket, "it isn't for me, it's for the system." And then they both laughed more.

"Yes! For the Gobelins and the Rossettis," said Lea, catching her breath, "and the thirty-six negroes—Oh dear!" and she went off into another peal of laughter, and Pedro laughed, too, until his sides ached.

"Well, good-bye," said Lea hysterically, and held out her hand.

"Good-bye!" said Don Pedro, laughing. "And thanks, awfully. I hope you'll be all right and everything. Perhaps, after all, it is the best thing for you."

And then, as Lea was still laughing, he began to laugh again, as he kissed her hand and said "Good-bye!"

He went out, and laughed all the way down-stairs at the drollery of the situation. And Lea, alone, laughed and laughed and laughed, till the tears rolled down her face, till she fell back in the chair with her arms thrown over her head, laughing and laughing and laughing, convulsed and shaken with laughter that resembled sobs.

XXII.

"TIME!" said Jack, putting his head in at the door. Lea sat up and smoothed the hair out of her eyes.

"You've been crying!" he exclaimed. Then he looked round. "Is he gone?"

"Yes, he's gone," said Lea, under her breath.

"Any row?"

"Oh no, dear me, no!" she said, shaking her head.

"Then what have you been snivelling for?" asked Jack, crossly.

Lea covered her eyes.

"I don't know! For shame and for joy. Oh, Jack, he's gone. Gone out of my life like an ugly dream that one forgets in the morning—done with—finished! Let's forget him, Jack—forget him!"

She came up to him coaxingly, and lay her ruffled yellow curls against his arm.

"A little . . . . just a little," she pleaded, in a whisper. "Only this once more! Please, Jack! My nerves are in such a horrible quiver. Just only this once more!"

Jack pushed her away.

"No, you shan't," he declared angrily. "You will never break yourself of it unless you do now. Think of Frank; think of to-morrow!"

"I can't think," cried Lea excitedly. "I can't think; I can't sit still. I must forget everything, or my heart will burst before he comes to help me. There are so many things," and she put her wild, white hand to her hair. "I must not think of them! There is Frank . . . . and Flossie . . . . and home, and peace! Oh! It is too much to hope for! I am afraid, Jack, afraid of dying before it all comes true. Oh, why isn't this to-morrow? Then I could count the time by hours and minutes, and spend the whole day standing at the looking-glass in that grey dress of mine, brushing my hair smooth,

and seeing how clean, and calm and good I look. But I have a whole evening and a whole night to live through, with my heart beating itself to pieces, and the blood rushing to my head, thumping against my temples, as if a maniac were shut up in my brain and trying to get out. Jack!" she cried, wringing her hands, "let me have some morphine—just a little—and I will go to sleep like a good girl, and sleep all night till to-morrow."

Jack shook his head.

"I have been brute enough to you, Lea," he said; "not one grain of morphine do you get again as long as I can prevent you. I wish to God," he said, turning his face away, "I could cure myself as well as you!"

Lea patted his head comfortingly. "So you shall, poor Jack, so you shall. But to-night——"

Jack turned on her fiercely.

"Not one damned drop of the filthy stuff to-night, or any other night," he thundered, and got up and walked away.

"Well, then, I shall go out," said Lea, sulkily.

Jack looked round. She stood near the window—a forlorn little figure, with her pathetic face and dim-gold hair.

"Where to?" growled Jack, angrily.

"Anywhere," she said, moving her pale, restless hands. "To the Casino—anywhere, anywhere! I must move, I must go about, I must do something. I cannot sit here and wait for twenty hours! If you won't let me sleep I will see people, and laugh, and forget what I'm waiting for and that I have to wait! I can't keep quiet. I'll go up to the Casino, and meet that horrid Countess, and those idiotic Frenchmen. What do I care? Only one night more—one stupid, horrible night to be lived through, and then—to-morrow! Oh, Jack!" and she went up behind him, and put her foolish, pretty head on his shoulder. "What a great day to-morrow always is! Not only this to-morrow, but all to-morrows! The very sound of the word pleases my ear better than poetry."

"You are maudlin," said her brother. "To-morrow is only a threatening yesterday."

"Oh, no!" cried Lea, shaking her starry curls; "the two have nothing to do with each other. To-morrow is new. To-morrow we are always going to do what we haven't done to-day. To-morrow we are always going to get what we have not had to-day—dinner, for instance!" she added, laughing. "But *this* to-morrow, Jack."

And again the white fear crept across her face, stronger than joy.

Jack sat down impatiently.

"You haven't told me anything," he grumbled. "What did the Dog say? How did you get rid of him? What is this doing here still?" and he pointed an angry boot at the roulette-wheel.

"Oh, never mind him! He's done with, and that's enough. I will tell you some other day," said Lea, clasping and unclasping her fingers in passionate nervousness. "Now I am going to dress. I cannot stay indoors another moment. I feel as if someone were pushing me out of the door! I am deliriously excited and restless."

At the threshold of the bedroom she stopped.

"Won't you come, too?" she said, looking at his large, protecting back and angry brown head.

"No, *thanks!*" said Jack.

Lea came back and bent over him.

"Poor, grumpy old Jack!" she said. Then she whispered into his ear, "Are you hungry?"

"No!" said Jack, in a treble tone. He drew his waistcoat together with both hands to show how sunken in he was. "Oh, no! Not hungry. I only have spasmodic contractions of the epigastrum, with depression of the abdomen, and cold extremities."

Lea laughed.

"Here, uncontract yourself," she said, taking the banknote out of Frank's letter, and stuffing it into her brother's collar. "Order up a big supper, and plenty of hot water

for—your feet," she concluded, and ran into the adjoining room.

Jack pulled the bill out of his collar, and looked at it. Then he roared at the top of an angry voice:

"Lea!"

"Oh!" gasped Lea, reappearing with frightened face. "What is it?"

"Where did you get this?" In answer Lea flourished the letter she still had in her hand.

"Frank?" said Jack, relieved. "Oh; all right."

'What did you think?" asked Lea.

'I thought it might be the Dog."

Lea rippled off into a little peal of laughter, and went back into her room. Jack could hear her still laughing as she moved about. Then suddenly he sat bolt upright and listened—she was singing. Lea singing! Without any reason whatever, Jack began blowing his nose, and coughing, and damning that cold. Then he stamped about the room, and cursed his eyes. Then he covered his face with his handkerchief and blubbered like a school-boy.

But Lea in the next room was moving about and dressing. And she was singing to herself, quite softly:

"Bye, baby bunting,
"Father's gone a-hunting,
"To shoot a rabbit for its skin
"To wrap little baby bunting in."

Surely there was nothing in such a silly song to make one cry!

XXIII.

"ARE you eating, Jack?" she said, putting her head in at the door.

Jack turned to the wall, and put his finger on the electric bell. He kept it there until he thought his face was natural and composed; by that time the waiter had run

up five flights of stairs, and had been knocking at the door for three or four minutes.

"Come in," said Jack, angrily. "What's the matter with you?"

The waiter looked frightened.

"I thought something had happened, sir," he said.

"Well, so it has," said Jack. "I'm going to pay my bill." Then he let the waiter recover from the shock of such an announcement.

"And I am going to have supper," added Jack.

"Yes, sir. What will you take, sir?" asked the waiter, drawing the menu from his bosom.

Jack ordered nearly everything on the bill of fare.

"Wine, sir?" asked the waiter.

"Yes. Bordeaux supérieur, red label.—That will do," said Jack. "Stop a minute," he added. Then he called into the adjoining room, "Lea! What will you have?"

"Nothing. I'm not hungry," was the answer. So Jack said:

"All right. Bring up the whole week's bill," and the waiter left the room.

"You're not hungry?" cried Jack. "Why, wasn't it in December that we last had anything to eat? And this is May."

Lea laughed.

"I'll eat when I come back," she said. "Wait for me."

"Wait for you?" cried Jack. "Haven't I waited long enough, by all germs and microbes? Wait for you, indeed!"

And he settled down comfortably in his armchair, and pulled a book by Jeanne Thilda out of his pocket.

"Well, I'm ready," said Lea, coming to the door. "Good-bye, Jack."

"Ta-ta!" said Jack, without raising his eyes. "You'll be a rag to-morrow."

"Oh, no, I shan't," said Lea. "I'll come back early."

A minute passed, and still she stood motionless at the bedroom door.

"Jack!" she said.

"Well?"

"Say 'Hurray!'"

"Hurray!" said Jack.

She laughed a young, happy laugh, low down in her throat, and went out through her room, letting the door slam behind her.

Jack read in lazy contentment. The waiter came in with a large tray and the bill on a little plate. Jack paid it. Then the man laid the table, lit the lamp, and brought the soup.

By the time dessert was on the table, and he had ordered coffee and *fine champagne*, Jack felt well and genial. He threw Jeanne Thilda's neurotic viciousness away, put his feet up on a chair, and lit a cigar.

"*Entrez*," he said. The waiter came in with the coffee.

"A gentleman to see you," and the waiter, handed Jack a card. Jack looked at it. Then his eyes dilated, horror-stricken.

"Damnation!" he cried. "I'm out! We're all out!"

"He's just outside, sir," said the waiter, under his breath. "Wouldn't wait downstairs. Said he knew you'd be glad——"

"I can come in, can't I?" said Frank, knocking at the open door.

Jack jumped up.

"Why, come in,—yes, of course," he said, going to him and shaking him by the hand. "I'm glad you've come. I am awfully glad you've come."

The waiter went out and shut the door.

Frank, travel-stained and haggard, looked round the room. Then he asked, in a lower voice, "How is she?"

"Oh, she's—she's all right," said Jack.

Frank put a strong, eager hand on his arm.

"Not in danger, then? Not really, seriously ill?"

"Well—no—not seriously," and Jack's mouth felt dry and rough.

"Thank God!" said Frank. And there was a pause.

"Where is she?" he asked, looking towards the open bedroom door. "I'll go to her at once. Or do you think you had better tell her? I wrote to her that I should arrive to-morrow, but I managed to catch the Nice Express and get here sooner. How is she, Jack? Speak up, can't you!"

"Yes—hm—" and Jack cleared his throat.

"Is she in bed all the time?" and Frank's eyes were large with sorrow in his paled face.

"No—oh, no—" said Jack.

"Will she ever get over it? Do you think she will ever be strong again?"

Jack's face looked white and flabby, as he turned to Frank and asked:

"What did she write to you?"

"A heartrending letter!" said Frank, in a low voice, his eyes quivering at the recollection. "She told me how ill she was. She told me the tortures of remorse and misery she had endured; she begged me to forgive her, and let her—die—at home!" He turned his head away. "I suppose I'm a fool, Jack," he added. But Jack was staring down at his boots, and never lifted his eyes. "Will you go and tell her I am here?"

"Look here, Frank," and Jack looked him straight in the face. "I want you to understand that Lea *is* ill——"

"I know, I know," interrupted Frank, misunderstanding him. "I will be—I won't harm her," he said abruptly. "When I made up my mind to forgive, I forgave. Don't be afraid." And he put out his hand to Jack. "She said you had been with her two months."

Jack nodded.

"I am glad you stood by her, Jack. I admit I used to think you a selfish brute of a fellow, but——" Then, suddenly: "You have never heard anything more of—of—that man?" and Frank's voice dropped, and his lips tightened.

Jack started up and brought his fist down on the table.

"Ch! Damn him!" he cried, while the dishes rattled, and the apples rolled off on the floor. "Damn us! Damn everything!"

Frank looked at him in amazement. Then a noise of laughter and singing reached their ears. Some noisy merry-makers were coming up the stairs, and their boisterous voices rang through the house.

"What is that?" said Frank. "It cannot be good for Lea to be in such a rowdy place, ill as she is. Do ring," he insisted, "and have word sent out to them to keep quiet."

But Jack had started forward with terror-wide eyes.

"Go away, Frank, go away," he said, trying to push him into the bedroom. "They are friends of mine. I don't want you to——"

"What on earth do you mean?" cried Frank, thrusting him aside and turning as pale as he.

Nearer and nearer came the laughter and the singing.

And the two men stood looking at each other with grey, aged faces.

Jack turned away.

"Now," he said, "if there *were* a God, He would stop her at the door!"

And the door burst open.

XXIV

THE Countess Vitali, in black and diamonds, Lea in scarlet satin with bare neck and shoulders and red roses falling out of her hair, and three gentlemen in evening dress pushed, flushed and laughing, into the room.

Frank turned round on Jack:

"You liar!" he said.

But Jack's eyes were fixed on his sister, with trembling compassion.

She had seen Frank directly; she had gone on laughing weakly, and staring at him as if she had lost her senses.

But the others had crowded round Jack, and were slapping him on the shoulders, and shaking him by the hand.

"*Eh bien, Monsieur Lester*, why were you not at the Casino?" "Aha! Having supper!" "*Tout seul? Pas possible!*" "Where have you hidden her? Confess!" And the Countess, lowering her voice, and glancing at Frank: "Who is that? Another stiff Englishman? He looks like a funeral. All Englishmen do."

Frank was standing in front of Lea, with his hands in his pockets, the amazement on his face giving way to a slow, scornful smile, as he looked her over from head to foot.

"I congratulate you on your recovery," he said.

She shook her head; her eyes were like those of a frightened animal.

"Oh, no!—No!—" she said, vaguely. "No!" Then, turning round to the others: "Go away! All of you! Go away!"

"*Tiens tiens!*" cried the Frenchmen. "*Mais qu'est-ce-que c'est donc?*" "*Aha!* A *tête-a-tête!* Shall we order supper?"

"Yes. Go away. Anything you like."

The Countess had put her head into the adjoining room.

"Here, come in here!" she cried, laughing and showing her teeth, long and yellow like those of a horse. "This is a charming room. *Il y a même plus qu'il ne nous faut!* You allow, *ma charmante*, an invasion of barbarians in your apartment? Do join us soon! And Monsieur also," she added, nodding at Frank.

They trooped in noisily, laughing and joking in loud, slippery French, but Jack went up to Lea, and took her hand.

She pushed him gently away, shaking her head without looking at him.

"Go—in there——" she said, brokenly. "Keep them—there."

And Jack went.

XXV.

FRANK still stood with his hands in his pockets looking at her. Then he spoke slowly, breaking his sentences as if his breath were short:

"I never quite understood—what pleasure—a woman could find—in making a fool of a man—till *now!* By God! What a laugh you are having at my expense."

Lea shook her head repeatedly. Her face was drawn with terror.

"'*Come!*'" cried Frank, laughing harshly, as he quoted the words of her letter. "'*I am dying! Come and look at my misery—my repentance—my shame!*' Aye, true, your shame! I see it in its horror."

Lea fell on the sofa, covering her face.

"So it is for this you called me?" Frank went on. "What do you want of me? Could you not leave me alone in my misery? What is this plot you have been hatching, you and your scoundrel of a brother, to humiliate and abase me?"

"No!" cried Lea, despairingly. "He told me to stay at home! No, it is not a plot. Ah! You will never understand!"

An idea struck Frank suddenly.

"Ah! Why, of course!" he exclaimed, with a harsh laugh. "I have come too soon! I have found you all unprepared! You did not expect me until to-morrow. Why, to-morrow," and he laughed again, "I might have found you the repentant invalid, the heart-broken, sack-cloth-and-ashes, soul-harrowing penitent! And I should have forgiven, and consoled, and—," with a gesture of horror, "taken you home!" He pointed at her, as she lay before him in her crimson satin, bare-necked and dishevelled. "*Taken you home!*" he repeated, and the memory of a dark, quiet nursery, and a lonely little child asleep, came over him like the cool solemnity of a church. "Ah, as I live, there *is* a God, who watches over us and forbids that such things should happen."

But Lea sat up with wild voice:

"A God? There is no God! Did I not thank him and cry to him in my joy when your letter came? Did I not promise my poor soul and my heart and my life to him, if only you forgave me, and were kind? 'God,' I said, 'God, make my husband come in at that door, and look at me, and open his arms to me, and call me by my name! If you let that be, God, I will believe in you and your power and your mercy for ever and ever. I will pass the rest of my life in humility and thankfulness. All the yearnings of my restless soul, all the storm of my wilful heart I will crush out, and kill in your Name, and lay my broken spirit at your feet!"

She laughed.

"God! Would a God have *let* me go out to-night? Would he have let me go out, singing and laughing, without one little word of warning whispered into my heart to stop me? Stop me! Why, it was as if someone were pushing me out! That was God, your God, telling me not to believe in him!"

"Blasphemy will not help you any more than lying," said Frank, in a hoarse voice. "What made you write that you were ill?"

"I *am* ill! I am ill!" she cried. "This," she said, touching her face, "is all paint—all rouge and powder! It comes off when I am alone, as my gaiety does. Oh!" she sobbed, "don't turn away like that! If I were to go out with my face as it really looks, and my heart as it really feels, people in the street would stand still and look at me, as at Heine's *Arme Peter*: 'God help us! She has been dug out of her grave!'"

But Frank said:

"Better a thousand times were you lying in it now, than standing before me as you are."

"You wish—*I*—were dead?" Lea said, slowly, the terror growing in her wide, light eyes.

Frank covered his face.

"Oh, Frank! You *wish* I were *dead?* No, you can't mean that. Think—think of the horror of it! I, dead! You know how dead people look, and *I* to look like that! Frank, Frank! You can't mean it."

"I don't know! I don't know what I mean!" he cried, starting up and taking his hat. "Live on, then, live on through your infamous life. But, living or dead, let me forget that I have ever seen your face."

He went to the door, but Lea sprang after him and stopped him.

"You shall go, you shall go," she panted, "but first I must speak to you. You shall not go away believing me worse even than I am! I went out to-night——"

Frank closed his ears. "Oh, I know! I know! What is the good? More lies for you and more disgust for me! Let it be. I have seen you—it is enough."

But she stood before him with her back to the door, barring his passage.

"I went out to-night," she said, her breath coming fast, her bare breast shaken with the beating of her heart—"driven out by my own wild joy at the thought of your coming. I could not rest—I could not wait. I begged and prayed Jack to put me to sleep with some opium, so that the weary hours of waiting should not drive me mad. He would not—how could he understand me? How could he know that I was afraid of not being able to live through all those hours that must pass before you came! I counted the hours! Eighteen, twenty hours, perhaps, with my heart thumping like a mad thing within me! Twenty hours to sit still and tremble, and wonder how you would look and what you would say! I could not! I could not!"

Frank had thrown himself on a chair with his hand over his face.

"I went in there and dressed," she went on. "I was singing all the time. Just think of it! Singing! Why, I haven't sung once in a whole year. I put on this dress,

the maddest, wildest dress I have, and I bought roses with the last two sous I had in the world! Your money is gone—all gone, you know! And I went out into the street, talking to myself and laughing under my breath till I was ashamed, for people stopped and looked at me. I went into the Casino, and got these people, and I begged them to come away. I prayed that they would come with me, and stay here all night, eating and drinking and singing! One does not *die*," she explained, "one cannot die—not for joy or fear—with a lot of people round one, eating and who have drunk too much! . . . . Then, I thought, in the morning, I will send them away. I'll wash my face in cool, clean water, and dress myself in a poor little grey dress I have there—I made it myself to wear if you came!—and I will sit at the window, I thought, waiting for him. I will count a hundred ever so many times, or say 'Our Father,' over and over again until he comes."

She was still standing at the door, her helpless head bent down, her fingers clasped. "Then, when he does come," she went on under her breath, moving slowly, fearingly, towards him, "I will get up without a word, and I will go to him and kneel down—" she knelt sobbing at his feet,—"and say: '*As it was in the beginning*' . . . . And he will remember, and forgive!"

Frank's lips quivered. He lifted his head and looked at her. Then, with a gesture of disgust at her bare neck—

"Cover yourself," he said, and turned from her again. She rose humbly. A lace scarf was lying across the back of a chair, and she put it round her shoulders.

Frank went on speaking in a hard voice, without looking at her.

"I will see that you get all you want," he said, "that you need not borrow, or beg, or——" he bit his lip fiercely. "You shall have money to live decently on, if you care to do so."

"Frank," she said, in a meek, thin voice, "I am really

ill. Jack knows it. I don't know what is the matter with me....it's morphine, and my heart, and my nerves! I really won't live long, Frank. *Take me home!*"

"Ah!" cried Frank, harshly, with a gesture of denial.

"Take me home. Please take me home," said Lea. Then she whispered, with her face ghastly pale: "My baby—! Frank!"

His hand tried to silence her, but she went on speaking.

"I'll stay where you like, shut up,—in some room all alone, where I can hear her voice. Just think, Frank, never to hear her voice—her little, shrill voice! She used to say: '*I love you meddy much.*' Does she still say '*meddy much*'?"

And, crying out, she went to him.

"Frank! Frank! Frank!! I must see her again." Then she spoke softly, quickly: "Let me go and put my cloak on and my hat; and take me away now, in the dark. I'll leave word for Jack. Frank! May I come? May I come?"

In the silence that followed they could hear Destiny breathe.

There was a loud burst of laughter in the adjoining room, and Frank threw her hand from him, and hardened his heart to the imploring blue of her eyes.

But she went on meekly, tremblingly:

"You will never regret it. I shall be so quiet and contented,—not seeing you often, but hearing your voices and knowing that I am in the same house with Flossie and with you. To know that I need only open a door to see you! I *won't* open it; it will be enough to know that I can! But if I am ill, you will both come in and sit with me and hold my hands. I don't know what to say—my head is empty—I can't find any words—only forgive! forgive! forgive!"

But Frank remained silent. Still on her knees, she slipped her tremulous hand along his arm.

"Turn round! Turn round! You won't forgive me

unless you look at me. Oh, Frank! Think of life being so short, and death eternal! You have only this little while to forgive me in. Oh, for your God's sake, oh, for my baby's sake, forgive me! I shall cry and cry for joy, and kiss your hands? You are like God, and can make life or death. Oh, Frank, if you would turn round, and look at me—" Frank turned his haggard face to her. "If you were to say: 'Lea! You are forgiven!—*Come home!!*'"

"Lea! Lea!" he sobbed, stretching out his arms,—"*Come home!*"

Still kneeling, she fell into his arms, and weeping, kissed his hands.

Then she lifted her wan, wet face.

"*Now*, may I come?" she whispered anxiously. "May I come directly? I am so afraid of something happening, of your changing your mind!—I'll put on my things, and we'll go—we'll go now."

Frank took her thin face between his two hands, and lifted it. Then he said, kindly:

"But there are no trains till morning."

Her tired eyes clouded.

"No trains! Could we not go to the station? Could we not go as far as Nice? Surely trains run all night to Nice. If we were only away from here, I should feel surer. Now, somehow, I am still afraid!" She looked white and hunted, and terrified. "It seems as if you might get up and steal away while I am not looking. Oh!" as the idea struck her soul. "You won't go away! You won't leave me again! It is all over! The fear, the terror! All over!——"

And she raised her eyes. What she read in his, who can tell? But, white and wonderful, over the anguish of her face, crept the tremulous light of a smile.

A knock at the door.

The waiter entered, greasy and polite.

"I beg your pardon, Madame, but Madame's husband has sent to ask for his things."

"Yes—yes—ah, yes," said Lea.

"Am I to say that Madame will send them down? Or that Madame is engaged?"

"Yes. . . . It's all right. . . . Yes, say that;" and Lea kept on nodding her head weakly, and smiling with grey-white lips.

"Yes, Madame," said the waiter, and left the room.

Frank looked perplexed.

"What did he mean? What was he talking about?" he asked.

". . . . Jack . . . ." explained Lea, with a little hysterical laugh, and her face was like that of a corpse. "It's about Jack . . . . they think that Jack . . . . that . . . . that that I am married to Jack . . . . they don't know . . . ." and she stopped, helplessly.

"What about his things? What things?"

"Oh, I don't know! His things . . . . his clothes. . . . I don't know!" She passed her hand over her forehead. "Oh, I don't know! Let us go away—let us go away."

Frank took her hand and held it.

"Poor Lea!" he said. "Poor, impulsive, blind, reckless Lea! Always rushing after the future, always driving on to to-morrow, always longing for what is out of her reach! . . . . Are you sure, Lea, sure that when you are at home, you will not be panting after something else, further away, or left behind? Sure that you will not tire again of your old life and of your new repentance?"

But Lea did not answer. A frenzy of fear was in her wide, wild eyes.

"Oh, take me away, take me away!" she said. "Let us go now, Frank. Let us go!"

Frank rose and put his arm round her, his strong, protecting arm.

He looked down at her drooping head, still crowned with the pitiful roses; he looked at her, helpless and broken, like one of Flossie's dolls, and a great wave of mercy flooded his steadfast heart.

"Come, Lea," he said. "Come—my wife!"

Then again that knock at the door.

And Lea knew that it was not the greasy waiter, but Doom, standing outside, merciless, relentless, inevitable—knocking, knocking, knocking at the door.

Was there nothing to stop it? Was there nothing to be done? Was there no one to save her?

She heard Jack's drunken voice singing in the next room. She turned to Frank.

He smiled down into her eyes with deep, still tenderness.

Then, with that smile upon her, she shut her eyes, and said:

"Come in."

XXVI.

IT WAS only the waiter.

"Monsieur says that, as Madame has company, it does not matter about the things. But Madame is please to send them to the Hôtel de Paris to-morrow morning."

"Yes," said Lea. And the man went out.

There was silence. Then Frank, in an agonized voice, said:

"LEA!"

She looked up at him hopelessly, stupidly, indifferently. She felt as if she were dead, and nothing mattered.

"*That is not Jack!*" he whispered, hoarsely.

"No," said Lea. And she really did not care at all.

Frank stared at her, white with horror.

"What *are* you?" he cried. "How have you been living? Oh, my God! and Jack—*with you!*"

"No! No! No!" said Lea, wearily. "That is not true."

But Frank had caught her by the wrists.

"What do you want of me? What did you write for? That letter! That pitiful letter! And all the time—ah! away! away!" He threw her from him, and she fell on her knees, still looking stupidly, vaguely at his face. "And

I told Flossie that I was going—to bring her mother home!"

Then Lea suddenly began to cry. Bitterly, piteously, looking up at him, she cried aloud like a child. And Frank was crying, too. But horror of her mastered his soul.

"Flossie's mother!" he cried, pointing at her. "Flossie's mother!"

Then she fell on her face, and wailed and wept at his feet.

"Who is it?" he said. "The same man? Or another? Or *any* other?" And he turned from her and went to the door.

"Don't go!" she cried. "Don't go! No! No!" and she clung to his arm dragging him back. "Don't go!"

He wrenched his arm from her. But she still held him, wildly, frantically.

"Don't go," she gasped. "Don't go yet. Wait a minute. I want to speak to you——" And she went on crying feebly, and holding on to his sleeve. "You said you would take me! . . . . You said you would! . . . . Oh, you'll come back! You won't leave me here—you won't leave me alone?"

"Come back! Come here again!" he exclaimed, with a short, hard laugh. "Oh, please Heaven, never!"

"Wait a minute," she panted. "Don't go yet! . . . . Not yet!"

But Frank, with hard, firm hands, unfastened the clutching fingers from his arm.

"Lea," he said, gravely, "if you want money, you can have it. I have told you so before. Now you must let me go."

Wildly and passionately she wept.

"Oh, Frank! Forgive me! Oh, kiss me. Let me kiss your hand! Don't go, Frank—*don't go!*"

She lifted her eyes, her poor blue eyes streaming with tears, and saw that she could not keep him, that it was all over. . . . No more hope!

Then around her and upon her fell the ruins of her life,

like a house of child's bricks that tumbles down—her wild hunt for happiness and her meek dreams of peace; the hope of her little child's head resting against her breast, and the promise of God's heaven that would explain and excuse all this useless storm and struggle—all fell around her, shattered and scattered like a toy-castle in a dream.

"Say goodbye, at least!" she cried. ". . . Good-bye! . ."

And Frank said "Goodbye." Then he opened the door. In her last anguish she threw her arms about his knees and tried to stop him. "No, no, Frank, no! Please stay! Please! . . . Stay. . . . "

But Frank dragged himself away from her, and went.

Gone? . . . . . She sat up and listened. Gone! She would never see him again! Never, all the years . . . living, dying, without seeing him or speaking to him.

He used to be so anxious about her, if she was ill or only looked a little pale . . . and now she was on her knees, crying and dying, and he did not come back, or comfort her, or care.

He had gone home alone . . . he had promised to take her . . . . . he had promised Flossie that he would bring her mother back.

"My baby! *My* baby!" she cried, and fell down on her face.

She dragged herself along to the sofa, talking to herself.

"I must forget—forget—forget! Morphine. . . . Morphine . . . to forget!"

She was shivering and muttering to herself. Then she sat up suddenly. What were they laughing at in the next room? Were they laughing at her? She gave a little shriek, and then stuffed her fist in her mouth to keep herself quiet.

There she sat on the floor quite still, trying to remember what she wanted. She saw Jack's smoking-jacket thrown across a chair close to her, and a sly, dreadful smile swept across her face.

She put out her arm and dragged it down on her lap. Then she rummaged through the pockets.

"*Where?*" she screamed in a loud, mad voice—then buried her mouth in the coat, lest someone should hear her. Her hand found the little bottle, and she hid her face in the coat again, shaking with laughter. Then she spoke to herself softly, quickly.

The needle! where was the needle? She could not go in *there* for the needle. The needle! *The needle!* THE NEEDLE!

As she stared at the bottle, she suddenly laughed again.

She drew out the cork and threw it away. Then she sat holding the bottle in both of her hands, looking into it.

"*And Socrates drank the hemlock,*" she said aloud, "*but over the dead bodies of those three hundred men!*"

And she laughed and laughed, remembering how she had mixed up Socrates and Thermopylæ like that, at her examinations, when she was in school a hundred years ago.

"*And Socrates drank the hemlock,*" she said, and drank.

"*But over the dead bodies of those three hundred men,*" she said, putting the bottle on the floor beside her.

Then she waited, with her hands pressed to her heart.

She started up with sudden fear, listening.

The turbulent heart hammered and knocked against her hands, in her head, in her ears. Like footsteps, quicker, quicker, quicker, the mad knocking filled her brain.

"Ah!" she screamed; "he is coming back!"

Tac-tac, tac-tac! Those were footsteps coming upstairs! *Tac-tac, tac-tac*—up the stairs. And he would find her dead!

She rushed to the door and looked down.

"Frank! Frank! Is that you? Ah! I knew you would come back," she sobbed.

Silence on the dark stairs. Then she put her hands to her heart again. There were the footsteps! *Thud, thud! Thud, thud!* Louder, louder, louder! . . . . What long

stairs! And she screamed with terror: "Who is that coming up the stairs? Is it you, Frank? Stop here! Stop here! Where are you going?"

Suddenly she stumbled back into the room, with starting eyes and hands thrown back over her head.

"Who is THAT coming upstairs?"

Not Frank!

With stealthy fear she put out her hand, and slowly, slowly, slowly—shut the door.

But she knew that SOMEONE had come up and was standing outside.

Knock-knock, knock-knock, knock-knock! Louder, louder, louder, till the room, and the house, and the world rang with the noise of that knocking at the door.

She knew that she must open—but first she must think of something to say to the One standing outside. What was she to say? A prayer or something. . . . . A prayer! She could not remember a prayer. "Bye, baby bunting" —that was all she could think of, and that was not a prayer!

Knock-knock! Knock-knock!

Yes, she would open. Yes—one moment . . . . .

Knock-knock! Knock-knock!

Terrified, she put her hands together.

"To wrap little baby bunting in," she said, and opened the door.

DEATH!

As she looked, a slow, wise smile spread over her face.

"*Happiness?*" she whispered, with timid, welcoming hands. "Is That you?"

There was a loud burst of laughter in the next room.

But Lea repeated: "Happiness! Is that you?"

"Hush," said Death.

THE END.